

MILEVEN IN HEAVEN



Mileven in Heaven by mileventhdoctor

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Summary: A collection of original, adorable, and emotional Mileven moments I envisioned, that occur before other unknown villains and monsters from season 3 interfere with their lives! Sometimes I will include other characters in the plot. Rated T for some strong language and making out. Enjoy! (P.S. If you like what you see, feel free to leave a comment! They are very much appreciated.)

1. Gate Closed, Fate Unfolds

Hey guys, I'm back! I am SO SO sorry that it has taken me this long to update my fanfic. It has just been so hard to juggle this on top of junior year and all of my extracurriculars. I wrote this a couple of months ago but was finally able to find the time to edit it over the winter break. Anyway, enjoy and Happy Holidays, everyone!

As El and Joyce were catching up, Max, Dustin, and Lucas were still fixated on the fact that El walked right through Max when she tried to introduce herself.

"Weird," said Lucas, fascinated.

"That's not saying much if it's coming from the weirdo herself," said Dustin.

laughs

"Guys! It's not funny," said Max, annoyed.

"We know...We're sorry," said Lucas.

"Well, great, now Wheeler and his girlfriend both hate me!"

"Don't say that! Mike doesn't hate you, he was just upset because El was gone and so he took it out on you," said Dustin.

"He took it out on all of us, but mostly you because he wasn't looking for another girl in the party to take her place," said Lucas.

"I get it. I just don't understand why she would just ignore me like that. I mean, she and Mike hardly got the chance to talk to each other tonight, and yet somehow she already hates me."

"Maybe she felt threatened," said Dustin.

"Why would she feel threatened? She doesn't even know me."

"Well, if what she said is true and she's heard everything that Mike's

said to her over this past year, then maybe she's heard more than just what he was telling her."

"He's right, she can listen in on what people are saying," said Lucas.

"And you don't find that even the tiniest bit creepy?"

"No, it's totally creepy, but it's also kinda awesome," said Dustin.

"Your point?" she said.

"Perhaps Mike complained to her about you, or something even worse," said Dustin.

"*sighs* Wouldn't be surprised...I have to talk to Mike about this."

"Okay, just try not to piss him off," said Lucas.

"*playfully hits shoulder* Not helping!" she said.

"Just kidding," he said with a smirk.

When El left to go close the gate, Max pulled Mike aside to discuss her dilemma.

"Go away, Max. I'm not in the mood."

"I know, it's just-"

"It's just that my girlfriend left to go close the literal gates of hell and I don't know if I'll ever see her again!"

"I know...*sighs* And I realize that I'm the last person you want to talk to right now, but something's bothering me too and I need you to help me figure something out."

"Fine, what is it?"

"Okay. So, look, I don't know if it was something you said to her during one of the 353 days that you called her, but El is ignoring me completely and I don't see how all of this is gonna work, you know with us being in the same friend group and all, unless I figure out why she's giving me the silent treatment."

"I may have bad-mouthed you a little..."

"That's what I thought...Okay, great, now she hates me too."

"I don't hate you, Max. I don't really like you all of the time, but I don't hate you."

"I'll take it," she said with a joking smile.

"And hey, El doesn't hate you either, and even if she did, she just doesn't know any better. I'll straighten things out with her. Don't worry about it."

"Thanks."

"Sure thing, Zoomer."

He called me Zoomer...Maybe this is his way of letting me know that I'm in the party! she thought.

"Oh, and one more thing," Max added.

"Yeah?"

"You know how I thought that something was messing with my board the day we were looking for Dart in the gym?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you think that since she was here in Hawkins the whole time and had been to the school before, that maybe she came looking for you, but saw us together, and assumed the worst?"

"What are you saying?"

"Do you think she's the one who knocked me off my board?"

"Well, in the moment, I thought it was her and I ran out in the hallway to see if it was, but I couldn't find her. It may have been though. It's possible that she just got jealous and ran away afterward because she was upset. Looking back on it, it probably was her."

"That's what I was afraid of..."

"For what it's worth, I'm sorry if she did."

"Thanks, Wheeler. That means a lot."

"Glad to hear it. Well, just in case it wasn't clear earlier, you are officially a member of the party now. I'm tired of pointlessly fighting with you. So, what do you say? Friends? *extends hand*"

"Friends. *shakes hand*"

"You know, you're not so bad, MADMAX."

"Not so bad yourself, Wheeler."

It was now 11:00 pm. El had just closed the gate back at Hawkins Lab. It took a toll on her, using her powers as intensely as she did. By the time she got home, everyone was lined up to hug and praise her. She had never felt so much love in one room.

"El, you did it! You really-"

El interrupted Mike with a big hug.

"*whispers* Did it." he continued and kissed her head.

When El saw Max, she threw Mike's arm around herself and held it as she looked at her, making it clear that he was hers. Mike looked at the situation and knew what he had to do.

"El?"

"Yes?"

"Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"Well, there was this day when the boys and Max and I were all looking for Dart, which was basically this baby demogorgon that Dustin kept as a pet until he found out what it really was. Anyway, Max and I were looking for it in the gym and then something knocked her off her skateboard. I helped her up, wondering if it was

you, and ran out in the hallway to check, but I didn't see you anywhere. Was it actually you?"

"*nods with guilt* I'm sorry, Mike."

"It's okay, El. It's partly my fault anyway. I shouldn't have said bad things about her to you. She's actually been a good friend, I haven't. I just went to this bad place when you were gone..."

"Me too. I fought with Hopper...A LOT."

"Oh yeah, I was gonna mention that...I kinda lashed out at him too. In fact, I should go make things right and apologize to him now. I'll be right back, okay?"

"Okay," she said, smiling.

Mike then walked out onto the porch to find Hopper, who was lighting a cigarette.

"Hey."

"Hey."

"Sorry, didn't mean to bother you, but I just feel like I owe you an apology...*clears throat* Look, I'm really sorry about earlier when I lashed out at you for keeping El from me. You were only trying to keep her safe and I was just being selfish. I wanted her to be safe too, just with me preferably."

"That's okay, kid, it happens. I was a little hard on the both of you and lost my temper more than I should have, and I'm sorry for that too."

"So, are we good?"

"Yeah, we're good."

"Good."

"Hey, kid, one more thing..."

"Yeah?"

"What exactly is going on with you and El?"

"Well, we haven't really talked about it yet, but I guess you could say that we both have feelings for each other. Hopefully, we'll get to go to the Snow Ball together, with your permission of course...?"

"The what now?"

"The Snow Ball. It's this school dance that's coming up. I promised her that I was going to take her to it last year, but obviously, that didn't work out...Maybe I'll ask her out at the dance...or New Year's."

"Whoa, slow down, Romeo! I haven't even said that she could go yet."

"I know, I was just saying, hypothetically, I mean...**sighs** Just think about it."

"I will."

"Oh, and if it helps at all to know this, we have kis-"

"I don't need to know *all* of the details, I was just askin'."

"Right..."

"If you do intend on going out with her, Mike, there are going to be rules, and lots of them, so just keep that in mind."

"I know that. Whatever it takes to be with her, then that's just what it takes. I'm willing to do it, no matter what it is."

"I'm glad we're on the same page."

"Me too. Well, I'm gonna go inside, but you should come in too, we're about to make a toast."

"Alright, I'll be there in a sec."

Mike walked backed over to El and said:

"Hey, sorry, I just really needed to say sorry to him."

"*laughs* No more sorries!" she said.

"You're right. All that matters is that we're together now. *hugs*"

Though many of them were still processing everything that had happened that night, Mike, Nancy, Dustin, and Steve had another thing in mind. They each set down bottles of soda and a stack of plastic, red Dixie cups on the table and instructed everybody to fill one up for themselves. Nancy began by saying:

"Can I get everyone's attention, please? *sighs* Look, I know that we're all tired and about to go home, but I think we should just take a moment to acknowledge and recognize that we've all been through a lot today and honestly this past year-

"But we got through it. We survived!" said Steve with emphasis.

Nancy began again, by saying:

"Right now we don't have anything left to worry about, and that could change, but for now we need to take some time to heal."

"Each of us was somehow involved or connected to this whole thing. It brought us together and that means something," said Steve.

"And none of this would've been possible without one very special person..." said Mike.

"This is called a toast," Mike whispered to El, and then continued, saying:

"This person is not like anyone I have ever met. This person is one of the strongest people I know. This person has overcome many obstacles and has saved each and every one of us in this room. This person is someone I know that I can always count on. This is their moment." said Mike.

El shifted her attention from the cup she was holding to the boy who was now holding her.

"*clears throat* Everybody please raise your glasses...or cups I guess-" said Dustin.

"To El, a true friend and hero to all!" said Mike.

Hopper smiles

"TO EL!" they all repeated.

"You deserve this. All of this," he said to her, as everybody clinked cups.

"I have everything I need, right here," she said with utter contentment.

As it got later, everyone started to leave. Though Mike and El wished to spend the whole night catching up and picking up where they had left off, he and Nancy were well aware that it was way past their curfew.

"Mike, c'mon. Jonathan's driving us back home."

"I need more time with El."

"You realize Mom's gonna kill us if we don't motor on home now!"

"We're leaving too. C'mon, let's go, kid," said Hopper.

"No," she said.

"Hopper, can I speak with you for a sec?" asked Nancy.

both walk away to talk in private

"I think the only way to get them out of the house is to take both of them home in the same car."

sighs I can't believe I'm saying this, but I agree...I'll do it."

"Thank you so much. I owe you one."

"Yes. you. do." Hopper mumbled as he walked away.

"Alright, you two. I'm taking both of you home. You and El will have plenty of time to say goodbye on the way there."

"Thank you!" she said, hugging him.

"*chuckles* You're welcome, kid."

Before leaving, Hopper walked over to Joyce to say goodbye.

"Geez, where the hell are these kids' parents?"

"Beats me!" she said, laughing.

"We make a good team, you and I."

"That we do...and you're doing a great job with El by the way."

"Well, I'm still working on it, but I appreciate it. *pauses* Just let me know if you need anything, okay? A lot has happened to your family and if you ever need anyone, I'm here."

"I will. Thanks, Hop. Goodnight."

"Goodnight, Joyce," he said, as he straightened his imaginary sheriff hat.

"What are you doing?" she asked, laughing.

"*chuckles* I'm so used to tilting my hat at work that I almost forgot I was wearing scrubs instead of my uniform."

"Oh, Hopper, you're too much! Goodnight...For real this time." she said, with a lot of eye contact and a big smile across her face.

"Night," he replied.

Mike and El both said goodbye to Will and hopped in the car, where they sat together the whole ride.

"*plays with hair* Your hair...It's- It's-"

"Longer, I know," she said laughing.

"Do you like it better this way?" she continued.

"It doesn't matter how your hair looks. Whether it's shaved or not, I

will always like it because I like you."

"*blushes* I like you too," she said, lifting her head from his shoulder.

First looking at him, then at the arm beside her, she wrapped her arm around his, reaching for his hand to hold with her own. At the same time, they interlaced their fingers together and looked at one another.

"You know, I had curly hair before I visited my sister."

"Hold the phone, you have a sister?"

"Yeah, Kali. From the lab."

"So, she has a number too?"

"Yes, it's eight."

"And powers?"

"Yes. She can make people see or not see whatever she wants."

"That's so cool! Well, when can I meet her? Does she still live here?"

"No, in Pittsburgh."

"Oh. How did you meet her then?"

"I went to Pittsburgh."

"Hopper took you to Pittsburgh?"

"No, I ran away to meet Mama and Kali."

"You have a mom too? Man, I really did miss a lot..."

"Yes, but the bad men hurt her too. She barely speaks."

"I'm sorry, El. That must've been really hard for you."

"Yeah, it was."

"Okay, I'm sorry, I distracted you. Why was your hair curly before you met your sister?"

"It grew curly on its own, then she gave me a makeover like you did."

"Well, I can't wait to see it without all of that product in it."

smiles

"You look really-"

"Bitchin'?"

"*raises eyebrows, laughs* Did you just say 'bitchin'?"

"Yeah, why?"

"*smiles* No reason."

"Alright, Mike. I'm afraid it's time for you to say goodbye to El," said Hopper.

"Wait, can I just please introduce her to my parents? I think it's about time that they meet the girl that lived in my basement for a week.
chuckles"

"*sighs* Make it quick. She has a curfew too you know!"

"Got it."

walks to door, rings doorbell

door opens

"Oh, Michael! *pulls in for hug* You had me worried si-Oh my god, is that?"

nods

"TED! YOU'RE GONNA WANT TO SEE THIS!"

Mike pulled El by his side, placing his hands on her shoulders and saying:

"Mom, this is El. El, this is my mom."

"H-H-Hi El...I've heard so much about you. It's so nice to finally meet you! *extends hand*"

"*shakes hand* Thank you...?"

"Mrs. Wheeler. You can call me Mrs. Wheeler."

"Thank you, Mrs. Wheeler."

"Ted, this is El."

"Who?" he asked.

"El!"

"Wait, El, as in Eleven El?" he asked.

"Yes, El as in Eleven El! Who else could it be?" she said.

"I don't know! Lots of people!"

"Guys..." Mike said.

"Sorry, so nice to finally meet you..." said Mr. Wheeler.

"Mr. Wheeler," Mike whispered.

"Thank you, Mr. Wheeler. It's nice to meet you too," said El.

"You're not coming here to live with us again, are you?" asked Mr. Wheeler.

"TED!" Mrs. Wheeler yelled.

"No," El said, laughing.

"It's a long story, but El's been living with Hopper this past year since the men from Hawkins Lab are still looking for her."

"Is that why the chief took you home instead of Jonathan, Michael?"

"Yes," he said.

"Ah, gotcha. Well, that's great news! I'm glad that you're safe, sweetie."

"Me too," said El.

"You're welcome over any time!"

"Thank you. *smiles*"

"Well, we'll let you two say goodbye..."

"Thanks, Dad."

door shuts

"And then there were two..." said Mike.

"Mike, I'm scared."

"Why?"

"Don't they know about me? My powers?"

"No, I didn't tell them. They only know that you were held in a lab against your own will, and I plan to keep it that way. They're just still a little spooked because of the hiding you in my basement from the bad men part, but they'll warm up to you, as you will to them. *smiles* Besides, you've got Joyce, Nancy, Hopper, the boys, and me all to vouch for you."

"*smiles* I'm gonna miss you."

"I'm gonna miss you too...a lot," he said, hugging her.

"*pulls away* Hey, do you have a phone number?" he continued.

"Yes, but I don't know what it is. Hopper won't tell me. He says it's for my own safety..."

"Oh okay. Well...Here, I have a pen. I'm gonna write mine on your hand if it's okay."

nods

"Okay...done. Just make sure to write it down somewhere else before you wash your hands again."

"Don't worry, I will."

"Call me soon, okay?"

"Promise."

In that moment, she looked at Mike and leaned in once again, trying to initiate the kiss herself this time, but was rudely interrupted by Hopper's car horn.

"*lays hand on shoulder* Don't worry. We'll have plenty more chances to do that again," said Mike.

"Promise?"

"Promise. Goodnight El. *kisses cheek*"

"Goodnight Mike. *kisses cheek*"

2. Snow Ball Continued

It was the night of the Snow Ball at Hawkins Middle, and quite an eventful night at that, with lots of dancing and smooching! After kissing Mike for the second time, El wondered what it all meant. She lifted her head up, looked at him with her big doe eyes, and said:

"Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"What is that called, when we make our lips touch like that?"

"Oh..."

chuckles and blushes

"A kiss. It's just something that two people who-"

"Like each other?"

"Yeah! Two people who like each other do..."

"It feels nice...I liked it the first time too, I just didn't know what it was called," El revealed.

"*smiles* Really? You liked it."

"*nods and smiles* Really."

"Again?" she asked, raising her eyebrows as she looked into his eyes and smiled.

He nodded as they leaned in and kissed again, this time a little longer than before. All of a sudden, El's face turned serious, she gulped, and said:

"Mike, can I tell you something?"

"Sure. Do you wanna sit down first?"

"Sure."

"What is it?" he asked, placing his hand in her lap.

"Hopper adopted me."

If El had told Mike this before his last conversation with Hopper, he would've felt more uneasy about the whole situation, but given that the conversation went well, he felt much better about Hopper being her father. Better him than someone he doesn't already know!

"Oh my god, El! That's amazing! How are you feeling about all of this?"

"We didn't always get along well, but when we did, we always had a really good time, so I'm pretty happy. I mean, how could I not be happy? I finally have a real dad... *tears up*"

wipes tear, hugs, and kisses her cheek

Towards the middle, Mike and El got some refreshments. It was then that he remembered sneaking several saran-wrapped eggos in the pocket on the inside of his coat.

"I brought you a little something, in case you didn't like the food here."

"Really? What is it?"

"Close your eyes."

She closed her eyes and he put it in her hands. The moment she opened them, she let out a big squeal.

"You know, they have microwaves here if you wanna heat one or two of them up."

"No, it's perfect. Thank you!"

smiles

Mike just stood and watched as she unraveled the saran wrap and nibbled on the beloved snack. He thought it was adorable how excited eggos made her. Jonathan even took some cute candid

pictures of them together as they shared the snack.

Suddenly, Max approached El.

"Mike, can I borrow El for a sec?"

"Sure."

girls walk off to the side

El was nervous. She and Max had technically never had a real conversation! Sure, they had interacted with each other before, but it never went very well, so El was expecting the worst. What was even worse was that she had absolutely no idea what Max wanted to talk to her about!

"Hey, El. I just wanted you to know that I'm not mad about what went down with the whole skateboard incident and I forgive you. Also, Mike and I were never together, in fact, he kind of hated my guts as much as you did for a while. Actually, Lucas and I are kind of a thing, in case you were wondering. Anyway, I just get the impression that you feel somewhat threatened by me and I don't want you to feel intimidated at all. Just because I'm now the new girl in the group doesn't mean that I'm trying to replace you."

"Thanks for giving me another chance. I'm sorry that I was such a bitch to you in the past."

"Of course! I mean, if I was in your situation, I probably would've done the same thing, so I understand where you're coming from. *smiles* What do you say? Friends? *extends hand to El**"

"Friends! *shakes hand**"

"You better be getting back to Mike now, he's waiting for you..."

El turned around to find him walking closer to her with a big smile across his face.

Mike took her hand, guiding her back to the dance floor and then spun her around, to her surprise. She had never experienced anything like this before, but she was loving every second of it.

"Hi."

"Hi."

pauses

"How'd it go?"

"Good! We're friends now."

"That's great, El!"

noses touch and smile

Things eventually calmed down and people started leaving. El, Max, and the boys stood outside and waited for their rides.

"Well, I don't know about you guys, but I thought tonight was *totally tubular*!" said Dustin.

everyone chuckles

"Bitchin'" El chimed.

Max and the boys laugh

"Later, guys."

"Later, Dustin," the boys replied.

Mike and Lucas exchanged stories about their kisses and Will started talking about the girl he danced with, while Max rolled her eyes and said "Boys."

El laughs

"Shit, my stepbrother's already here! He's gonna kill me!" Max realized.

"My mom's here too. Bye lovebirds...and Will."

all three laugh

"I'll see you later, Stalker."

"Till tomorrow, MADMAX."

Will and Eleven got acquainted until Joyce arrived. After that, there was nobody left, but Mike and Eleven.

"M-M-M-mike, I'm-c-c-c-cold!"

"Here, wear my jacket," he said as he placed it on her shoulders.

Then he said:

"C'mere."

This was all new to her, but with each moment that she spent with him, she grew more and more comfortable, despite not knowing what a relationship with a boy entails. He was her home...her new home. One thing led to another, and she started to move closer to him. He was very gentle with her. He placed one hand around her waist and wrapped his other arm around her back, in between her shoulder blades. She wrapped her arms around his shoulders tightly and rested her head on one of them. He rubbed her back up and down with his right hand as he swayed her from side to side. It was as if they were in the gym dancing again...

All of a sudden, it started to snow! They both felt snowflakes hitting their heads and looked up.

"It's snowing!" Mike cheered.

"It looks pretty...good," she teased.

Mike blushes and both giggle

Mike's mom arrived, but he insisted on waiting with El until Hopper came because he had no intention of leaving her by herself at night, in the cold. In the meantime, Mrs. Wheeler parked the car nearby and continued reading her erotic novel, "Heart of Thunder."

Mike grabbed El's hand and interlaced his fingers with hers as they waited on the outdoor bench, their eyes saying what words could not.

"I've dreamt of this moment for so long..." he revealed.

"Really?"

"Yeah, really."

"I have too," she revealed.

"I can't believe it's actually happening!" he said.

"Me either."

"You and me-"

"Together, finally," she said.

Hopper finally arrived and Mike and El made their way to their cars. They always dreaded saying goodbye to each other because they couldn't shake the feeling that they would lose each other again. They never knew if this time would be their last. In a town like Hawkins, anything was possible.

"Mike-Here's your coat."

"Keep it. It looks better on you anyway!"

"You sure?" she asked.

"Promise," he said.

smiles and blushes

Suddenly, looking confused, she asked:

"Mike? What did Lucas mean earlier, when he called us 'lovebirds'?"

"Oh...Well, do you know what love means?"

"Yes."

"Oh good! Well, he was just teasing us, implying that we're in love..."

"Oh, I see."

Phew, that was a close one! he thought. He was pretty sure that he was in love with El and she was pretty sure that she was in love with Mike, but neither of them wanted to rush into anything, so they didn't bring it up again until they knew they were ready. Plus, how sure can you be when you're a tween!

"Will you two hurry up already? It's getting late!" Mrs. Wheeler exclaimed.

"Yeah, sorry, Mom," Mike replied, rolling his eyes and laughing.

They both stood up and faced each other.

turns to El and grabs both of her hands

"El, tonight was amazing! Thanks for coming."

"Thanks for keeping your promise..."

"*smiles* Let's talk soon, okay?"

"I'd like that."

"Great, well, I'll see you later, El."

And with that, he kissed her forehead, gently let go of her hands, and started to walk away, but before he could, she grabbed his wrist and said:

"Mike! Wait, you forgot a little something!"

She pulled him and his confused face in for a sweet, lingering kiss that neither of them would *ever* forget. A perfect end to a perfect night!

3. Deck the Halls with Jopper Jolly!

It was December 16, 1984, the day after the Snow Ball. El didn't know how long she was supposed to wait before calling a boy. She didn't know a lot about boundaries, so when she would get bored, she would always think about calling Mike. She was still sweet and shy though, so sometimes she had trouble making the first move.

Mike, on the other hand, couldn't get the night before out of his head. He never thought much of the Snow Ball before he met El, but the fact that his date to the dance was the only person he really wanted to be with made it all worth it. He didn't want to rush anything though because he wanted to give her a chance to come to him.

When a week passed by and neither of them had heard from one another, they both grew hopeless and impatient. Mike sat in her fort and turned on the supercomm.

At the same time, El was at home working on the homework Hopper assigned her before he left for work. She couldn't help but miss the way it felt to be with him. She couldn't help but wonder when she would see Mike again. Since she wasn't allowed to see him without Hopper's permission, she didn't try and leave, though she did think about it. Instead, she decided to turn on the tv noise and visit him, to see what he was up to.

Little did they know that they were both thinking of and trying to visit each other at the same time. He couldn't see her, but she could see him. She walked over to the fort and sat in front of him.

"Hey, El. I tried to do my homework, but-"

"Mike!"

"El! Oh, It's so good to hear your voice again...I just wish I could see you face-to-face."

"Me too," she said.

"I had trouble concentrating today...I just couldn't stop thinking about

you."

"Really?" she asked with a smile.

"Yes, really."

"How funny, I had the same exact problem."

"Oh, you did now?"

nods

"El, do you know what Christmas is?"

"Yes."

"Good. Well, my mom really wants to get to know you better. She's hosting this Christmas Eve dinner party at our house and she invited you and Hopper. *pauses* You don't have to go really if you don't want to. It might be kinda boring..."

"No, I want to! I wanna see you and your family, but mostly you..."

"*smiles* Okay, great. The guys will be there too, and Max."

"I'm so excited. *pauses* Aww, man, I have to go. I'll see you soon, Mikey Poo!"

"Bye, Ellie P-Yeah, it doesn't really work with your name...I'll come up with something clever later."

"*shakes head, chuckles* Bye, Mike," she said sweetly.

smiles and takes off blindfold

[Time-Jump, 8 days]:

It was Christmas Eve, 1984, and all of the boys' families, and Steve, Max, Eleven, and Hopper were going to the party.

Back home, El was scrambling to find the perfect outfit to wear for the occasion, hoping to impress Mike.

She set numerous outfits out on the bed, trying to figure out which one was best. She decided to ask Hopper for a final opinion.

"Which one?" she asked, as she held her two favorites up in the air.

"Definitely the red one."

"Got it. Thanks. *kisses cheek*"

"Glad I could help."

El threw on a poofy, red blouse and a green corduroy pencil skirt, with black tights and Mary Janes. She also wore a mistletoe clip in her hair, in hopes of kissing Mike. Funnily enough, her outfit matched with what Hopper was wearing, a plaid, red and green, button-down shirt. After they were both ready, they walked out the door and headed for Mike's.

When they arrived, Joyce was the first person Hopper talked to. Since Bob's death, he had been helping Joyce deal with her grief, but along the way, an attraction developed between them. They now found themselves spending a lot more time together because of this.

"Hey."

"Hiya, Hop. Merry Christmas! *hugs*"

"*hugs back* You too."

"Wanna step outside for a smoke?"

"Ah, I would, but I'm actually trying to quit, ya know, for El's sake."

"I gotta say, I'm inspired. I've always felt guilty smoking around the boys...Maybe I'll quit too."

"You should. I feel like a whole new person. Flo's always trying to get me to quit, and I always thought she was full of shit, but I see why now. El's in on it too. She watches me like a hawk, making sure I don't sneak one every once in a while. Of course, it wouldn't matter because she could just whip it out of my hand with one stare."

"Hahaha, yeah that's true. Well, I'm proud of you, Jim. Really, I mean, I think that's great that you're trying to set an example for El."

"Well, I do what I can. I just hope that I can follow your example as a parent..."

"*blushes* Aww, stop it! You're making me blush!"

"*smiles and then fades* I mean, I used to have a daughter, so I know a thing or two about parenting, but I never got the chance to raise a teenager until now."

"Pretty tricky, huh?"

"You sure make it look easy."

"Well, I've also known Will and Jonathan since they were babies. You, on the other hand, have a hormonal teenager with superpowers that you only met about a year ago."

"Good point."

"Being a single parent's not easy either, is it?"

"Not at all."

"Well, you're not alone."

"Neither are you. Ever."

"Thanks, Hop."

"Sure thing, Joyce."

Mike, on the other hand, was back in the living room with his friends. On the inside, he was an anxious wreck, wondering where El was, but he kept his cool. After Mrs. Wheeler greeted them at the door, she told El that Mike was in the living room waiting for her.

She walked over with caution, nervous, and afraid of embarrassing herself somehow. Of course, she was worried for nothing. As she turned the corner, she approached Mike, walking with confidence

and a cute, shy smile.

Mike was frozen in place. Every time he saw her, she looked even more beautiful than the last time. Practically drooling, he said:

"H-Hi El! Wow, you look amazing," he said.

"*blushes* You really think so?"

"Yeah. Yeah, I really do."

"Lucas, Will, Max, Steve, this is our queue to leave. C'mon!" said Dustin.

"Whoa, that rhymed!" he whispered to himself.

They all hesitantly followed Dustin to another room.

"What the hell? Why'd we leave? I was just about to get a cookie."

"Because Lucas, we're in the midst of a major Mileven moment. We can't interrupt that."

"Mileven? What's that?"

"*uses hand gestures* Mike, Eleven, Mileven!"

Everyone exchanged confused looks until Dustin added on by saying:

"Oh c'mon, guys! It's just like when I made up the term, demodog."

"You're crazy."

"I might just be!"

And Dustin was right because Mike was about to show El just how lucky she was to have a sweet guy like him. Taking advice from Steve, he faked a yawn, throwing his left arm around El's shoulder, the oldest trick in the book. In keeping with the myth that the person you like will yawn if you do, she too let out a yawn. She then rested her head against his shoulder, enjoying the closeness.

"So, you're spending Christmas with Will's family this year?" Mike

asked.

"Yep."

"That'll be fun. Will's a good guy. I think you two will be good friends."

smiles

"Well, before the night's over, I wanted to um...Well, I got you a little something."

"What'd you get me?"

"Well, I can't tell you, silly! That would ruin the element of surprise"

"But I didn't get you anything..."

"I didn't expect you too. It's not much, just something I thought you would love to have."

"Thanks, Mike," she said, putting her hand on top of his right one.

He looked at her, slightly shocked. She returned his feelings, again and again. Though they had liked each other for a long time, he continued to feel nothing but electricity whenever she touched him.

She undid the bow with a single stare but tore the wrapping paper herself to find a series of framed photos. Of course, these weren't just any framed photos. No, they were pictures from the Snow Ball. Jonathan had taken 4 photos of them. Three were off guard; one was of them dancing, the other of them feeding snacks to each other, and the other of them laughing. There was also one of them purposely posing for a picture. She was speechless! She absolutely adored and treasured it. She couldn't wait to hang it up in her room. She looked down at it with glee showing all over her face.

"Mike..."

"I just thought you might need a little something to take away from that night."

"It's perfect! *kisses cheek*"

blushes

"Happy," she said, pointing at the pictures.

"We look so happy together." she continued.

"Together, huh? I like the sound of that," he said, wondering if she knew what that meant for their relationship.

All she knew was that she liked him back and enjoyed being with him, but that was enough for now. She smiled and nodded, patting his hand and interlacing it with her own.

"Wait, I have one more thing for you..."

"What is it?"

He then handed her an eggo box with a bow on it. He told her that he would just keep it in his fridge until she was about to leave. Little did she know that she would find a little love note on the inside of one of the tabs when she opened it... 🥰

Once Dustin gave the rest of the gang his signal, they all returned to the living room, sitting around Mike and El.

"Hey, where have you guys been?" Mike asked.

"Oh, nowhere..." said Max.

"Just getting something to eat," Dustin added.

"Really? I don't see any food," said Mike.

"That's because-" said Lucas.

"We ate it in the kitchen," said Will.

"Uh huh..." said Mike, knowing that that wasn't the full story.

A few days later, after the party and Christmas morning, El was eager to invite Mike over and show him the presents she got. Her favorite,

other than Mike's, was the one that Hopper gave her, a Magic Eye book to feed her curiosity. She was still a little confused about how it worked, so he taught her himself.

"So, the trick to this is that you cross your eyes and then uncross them, so that way your focus is still on the area you're directly looking at. You should be able to see a 3D image. This one's supposed to be a Christmas tree. Do you know how to cross your eyes?"

"Yeah, see?"

rolls eyes without crossing

"El, you're so cute! You didn't cross your eyes at all, you just rolled them."

"Ugh. *grunts in frustration*"

"Okay, how 'bout this...Imagine that that red dot right there is Rudolph's nose and you have to focus on that part of him in order to see the rest."

long pause as she attempts it

squeals

Mike laughs

"I got it!"

"See, I knew you could do it!...Wait a minute, is that blood?"

"No..."

"Friends don't lie. I know you used your powers!"

As the blood continued dripping from her nose, he wiped it with his finger and waved it in front of her.

"Aha, I knew it! El, you are such a badass!"

"Guilty as charged!"

"Have you been watching courtroom dramas?"

"Maybe..."

both laugh

"*gasps* I know what I'm getting you now!"

"Oh yeah?"

"Yeah," she said, as she attempted to take the mistletoe clip out of her hair.

What El did not realize was that it was tangled up in her hair, rather than holding it back as she thought.

"This was supposed to be romantic!" she said, laughing as she took it out of her hair.

"It is," he said, the moment that she began dangling it above them.

"C'mere," she said, leaning in to kiss him and resting her hands on his soft cheeks.

"Merry Mileven, everybody!" said Dustin.

The night ended with Mike getting into a pillow fight with Dustin. Naughty boys! 😊

4. Sparks Fly

It was New Year's Eve, 1984, and the boys had a special tradition where they shot off fireworks in Mike's backyard each year. This time, they invited El and Max along too. Mike was really looking forward to seeing El again and showing her fireworks for the first time.

When the girls arrived, Mike and Lucas showered them with hugs. Dustin and Will started getting the fireworks ready, but Will had trouble lighting one of the matches. So, he asked El if she could use her powers to light it. She nodded and flicked her head to the side to swipe the match against the side of the matchbox.

"That was awesome! You did that in like two seconds!"

"*laughs* Piece of cake!"

Will took the now lit match and lit the firework. Before the popping sounds started, Mike told El about New Year's, how they would kiss at midnight when the year changed, and about making New Year's resolutions.

"That's so cool!"

"Yeah, it really is."

pauses

"Also, El, the fireworks are really loud. I'm just warning you about this because they kinda just pop out of nowhere, and I don't want you to be scared, okay?"

"Okay."

"They're really neat, but I wouldn't be surprised if the sounds triggered a bad memory for you. If that happens, just remember that I'll be right here with you the whole time."

nods

They sat down on the blanket. She sat in his lap and rested the back of her neck on his shoulder, his arms wrapped around her.

The fireworks started going off and her initial reaction was:

"Wow, they're so...pretty."

smiles and kisses her head

As the sounds got louder and more frequent, she got more and more tense and anxious. Suddenly, all of the images of Papa and the lab came flashing back. She couldn't bear it. She started sobbing. She turned around and hugged Mike tightly, clinging to his shirt. Causing a scene, she said:

"Mike, *sobs* it's happening!"

He grabbed and hugged her tightly. His left hand was tucked around her head, his fingers running through her hair as he swayed her back and forth.

"Sh, sh. It's okay, it's okay. You're safe now. I'm here and I'm not going anywhere!"

lifts head and gazes into eyes

puts hands on face

"*sniffles* Promise?"

"Promise!" he replied.

He leaned in and kissed her on the forehead. It was all better from there on out. She got used to the sound and was able to enjoy the fireworks with everyone else. Eventually, they got tired and lied on their backs. Their arms were intertwined, their fingers interlaced, and their other hands, on the outside, were pointing up at the beautiful stars in the sky.

Eleven checked her watch (a.k.a. Mike's watch that he gave her).

"It's 11:58 now," she announced.

They sat up and all started walking inside. As they were gathering around the t.v., where they found Mr. Wheeler sleeping in his lazy-boy, Mike pulled El aside.

"El, before we go over there, there's something I've been wanting to ask you for a long time now and I wanna do it before we start the new year...You see, we're kind of already in a relationship, but when a guy and a girl like each other, the guy often asks the girl to go steady with him, so I was wondering if you would go steady with me."

"Yes," she said, not really knowing what she was getting herself into, but knowing that he was all she wanted.

He pulled her in for a hug and kissed her face all over. She could not hide her smile. She was far too happy to contain her joy.

There were 10 seconds left in the countdown. Will was standing next to Dustin, Lucas next to Max, and Mike and Eleven, who held hands until the very last second.

"3, 2, 1!" they all said together.

They all turned to each other and said 'Happy New Year' at the same time:

[Dustin and Will say "Happy New Year!" to each other.]

hugs

[Lucas and Max say "Happy New Year!"]

hold hands

kiss

[Mike and Eleven say "Happy New Year!" to each other.]

jumps into Mike's arms, spins around

kiss

"Now, you're officially my girlfriend!"

smiles big

foreheads touch

5. Somebody Call The Police!

Hey, guys! Happy New Year! This year's gonna be great, one reason being that *Stranger Things* will be back before we know it, and even more importantly, Eleven will be too! 🤖 I hope you enjoy this. I wanted to include a chapter that explains how other people in the town would eventually find out that Eleven is Hopper's kid. This is less about Eleven than it is that, but there's "acute" moment in this chapter that I think you all will like. 🤖

After Eleven went to the Snow Ball, people in the town started asking questions. Questions like *Who's that new kid? Whose daughter is that? Does she even go here?* and the list went on and on. Sometimes when Hopper went shopping for groceries, he would hear them talk about her. He wanted to say something, but that would be unnecessary and awkward.

One day, before leaving work, he decided to tell his colleagues.

"I need to see you two in my office."

both walk into office

Hopper shuts door and all sit down

"What is it, Chief?" asked Powell.

"Well, you remember the girl that supposedly broke into the grocery store, the one that Murray tried to convince us was Russian?"

"Yeah," said Callahan.

"Well, *sighs* I adopted her." said the Chief.

"Say what now?" Powell remarked.

"Look, she's had some issues in the past because she's never had real parents other than Dr. Brenner when she lived at Hawkins Lab, and all he did was do was use her for dehumanizing science experiments! *pauses* Anyway, it's a long story, but she kind of fell into my hands

when she ran away. So, I raised her for about a year and now she's my daughter."

"Wow. I had no idea...*We* had no idea!" said Powell.

"Yeah, I know, and I'm sorry for keeping it from you, but you can't tell a soul about her past, neither of you. Got it?"

"Got it." they both said.

"Good. Well, anyway, I'll catch you guys later."

On the way home, he remembered her having asked him if she could visit his work, but at the time, things weren't safe enough. Now that the town was safe again and his two closest colleagues knew about her, he decided that he would bring her there to see what he actually did for a living in action. What safer a place than the police station! He figured that this would be the perfect way to civilize her into society, by introducing her to all of his colleagues as his adopted daughter, El.

knocks on door

door unlocks

walks toward door to greet him

"Hey!"

"*walks in with hands behind back* Hey. You hungry?"

"Yes."

"Good because I brought you Wendy's!" he said as he pulled the bag out for her to see.

"Yum! Thanks!"

"Sure thing. Why don't you go wash your hands and I'll heat it up!"

"Ok," she said, catching the hand sanitizer she levitated to herself.

"El, you can at least wash your hands manually!"

"*giggles* Sorry, old habit."

Once they both finished, they sat down and each ate their burgers, sharing the fries that he had ordered for the both of them.

"How would you like to come to work with me tomorrow?"

"Really? I thought you said that it was too dangerous."

"At the time you asked it was, but I changed my mind, so how 'bout it?"

"I'd love to!"

"Good. I think you'll like my colleagues a lot."

"Colleagues?"

"Yeah, colleagues are the people that you work with."

"Gotcha."

The next day, Hopper woke El up at 6:30.

"Rise and shine, kid," he said, turning on the lights.

"Too early..." she groaned.

"If you get up, I'll make you eggos."

"Deal," she said, hopping out of bed.

"Works every time," he mumbled to himself.

Once they arrived at the station, he said:

"*holds shoulders* Just be yourself, but let's keep quiet about the lab and your powers, okay?"

"I will, I promise."

"Good," he said as they walked in, holding hands.

"Morning," he said to Flo.

"Morning, Hop and who's this?"

"I'm El, his daughter."

"I-I'm your father's secretary, Flo."

"Nice to meet you, Flo."

"Nice meeting you too," she said as they walked away.

Hopper directed her to his office, where he gave her a donut and told her to wait for a minute while he talked to Flo about something.

"So, you have a daughter now..." Flo said with a smile.

"That I do. *pauses* I adopted her a while back, but I thought it was about time that she saw the place where I work and meet the people that I work with."

"I gotta say, I'm surprised. You have a very private life, but I'm glad that you're sharing this with us."

"Me too."

"Before you go, Melvald called about a break-in at his store last night."

"Was Joyce working there that night?!"

"I'm not sure, you'll have to ask him yourself."

"Okay. Thanks for telling me, Flo."

"Of course! It is my job, after all."

lights cigarette

"Put that out!"

"Bite me."

shakes head

Chief walks back to office

"How was the donut?"

"Good, really good."

"I'm glad. Well, let me introduce you to the rest of my coworkers."

"Okay," she said.

"Morning, Chief!" said Powell.

"Morning, boys."

"Who's the kid?" asked Callahan.

"Mine. *clears throat, projects voice* Everybody, this is my daughter, El."

He was surprised to find that some of his coworkers still thought that his daughter's name was Sara, but those who knew of her death were pleased to meet El for the first time.

While Hopper looked into the robbery, he had El hang out in his office for a little bit.

"Don't go anywhere, don't touch anything, but if you need me, I should be around here for most of the day and I'll probably be in and out of the office. If I'm about to leave for a while, I will let you know. Are you good here for a while?"

"Yes."

"Alright then. Here are some paper and pens for you to draw with. Go nuts!"

"Thanks."

Once Hopper found out that Joyce was working the night shift during the break-in, it gave him an actual reason to call her.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Joyce. I heard about the break-in."

"Oh Hopper, I'm so glad you called! It was awful."

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah. They gave me the day off."

"That's good. Well, would you mind coming down to the station and answering a couple of questions?"

"No, not at all."

"Great. Well, I'll see you then."

"See you."

When Joyce arrived, he brought El out to see her.

"Hey, sweetie!" she said.

"Joyce!" she replied, giving her a hug.

"What are you doing here?" she continued.

"Well, there was a break-in at the general store last night, so your father's going to ask me some questions about it."

"Aww, I'm sorry, but I'm glad you're here."

As they were talking, Hopper snuck away to bring Mike, who had biked over, inside his office before El noticed.

When El went back into his office to draw, she found Mike sitting in Hopper's desk chair, with his feet kicked up.

"*gasps, smiles* Mike! What are you doing here?"

"Your dad called my house and said you would be here today, so I thought I'd stop by."

both hug

"What a nice surprise!"

"Nice drawings by the way," he said, admiring the doodles of him.

"Thanks, you can keep them."

They hung out in his office for a while and both worked on some homework together until it was time for Mike to go home and eat dinner.

"What kind of triangle is this, again?"

"You know, you'd make *a cute* triangle."

"*giggles* Seriously, what kind of triangle is it?"

"I just gave you a hint. Think about what I said."

"*ponders* Oh wait, is it acute?"

"Yes, but not nearly as much as you are."

"You're acuter!"

"No, you are!"

This playful argument soon turned into a goofy staring contest, but looking into Mike's eyes only made El want to kiss him more. Eventually, she gave up and pulled his face toward hers with her mind. It was aggressive, but the kind of aggressiveness that made you want more. From the way things were going, he thought that they were finally going to make out, but sadly, Hopper interrupted them before they could. They both pulled away, acting awkwardly around him until he told them that Mike's mom called and said that it was time for him to come home for dinner.

"Yes, sir," he said, packing up his things.

Suddenly, "Every Breath You Take" had a whole new meaning when it came to Hopper, a.k.a. The Police, watching his every move. He

leaned in for a kiss again, but with Hopper breathing down his neck, he chickened out and just whispered that he would call her later.

After Mike left, she ran out of things to draw. So, she decided to draw a picture of Hopper and Joyce talking. She was having trouble drawing on her own, but when her powers came into play, her art looked like Leonardo da Fucking Vinci! Once the workday was over, Hopper and El got in the car, heading home. Before he drove away, he said:

"Did you have fun, meeting my coworkers and hanging out with Mike?"

"Yeah, they're all really nice! I like Phil. He's really funny."

"He can be..." he mumbled.

"Oh no!"

"What is it?"

"I left something in your office."

"Okay, here's the key."

"Thanks. I'll be right back."

When she came back, she said:

"Here's the key, and I made this for you. *hands drawing*"

"You drew this?"

nods

"Wow, kid, this is pretty impressive!"

"You really think so?"

"Yeah, I love it."

smiles

"Thanks, kid. I love it!"

Little did she or Joyce know that he folded it up and kept it in his wallet whenever he missed either of them.

6. I Hide, You Seek

The last time Mike and El saw each other was when they hung out at the police station two weeks back. Since then, El's relationship with Hopper was strained and he was being more overprotective than usual. El didn't know why. He only caught them kissing, but all couples did that, so why would that be what was bugging him? She then realized that work had been stressing him out lately and that he had been drinking more because of it that. He had told her about what alcohol could do to people when they've had too much and she realized that was the reason why he had been acting so different lately.

To Mike, Hopper was like that one teacher that would never change your grade even when you deserved a better one. He was strict, unfair, and tended to act irrationally angry towards him sometimes. It was because of this that Mike was having a rough time himself. El wasn't allowed to answer his calls and it confused him. He thought she was mad at him until he asked Max to call her and find out for him. Max explained to him what was going on and said that El missed him. He then told Max to tell El that he missed her terribly and to just be patient.

It continued like this for days, the two talking to each other through Max. Mike missed El so much that it caused him to act out at school again by not participating in gym, resulting in detention. His mom was really disappointed in him when she found out and decided to take away his supercomm and phone privileges. When she caught him with the phone anyway, she took away his Atari. Luckily, he was able to find where she put it and quickly ran to the basement to hide it. He had trouble thinking of a good hiding place for it, but then it came to him! He would put it in El's fort, somewhere Mrs. Wheeler would never dare touch! So, he lifted up the curtain, without realizing that El was behind it the whole time, waiting for him.

lets out a girlish scream with a major voice crack

El giggles

"MIKE? ARE YOU OKAY?!"

"YEAH, MOM, I'M FINE!"

"*whispers* Phew, that was a close one! *pauses* I can't believe it! It's really you! You scared the shit out of me by the way! I mean, I'm glad you're here, but still. *hugs*"

"Sorry that I scared you! I-I just missed you so much...So, I ran away."

"El..."

"*sniffles* I just couldn't take it anymore, being cooped up in that house. I love Hopper, but I hate being around him when he's drunk and it's just too hard not seeing you every day," she said tearily.

"I missed you too, El."

puts hand on cheek and strokes with thumb

both lean in for a kiss

pulls away

Mike grabs hand and kisses it

"It's good to be back home," she said, winking at him and climbing into the fort.

He looked at her, amazed. She had settled in so easily, so comfortable with him. She was finally here. The girl he had been obsessing over for a year was finally back in his life and she was right there with him.

"What are you waiting for? C'mon," she said, pulling him by the hand.

He fell into the fort beside her and the whole thing came crashing down on top of them. Through laughs and smiles, you could tell that they weren't upset over the fallen structure. Mike turned to El to find one of the sheets hanging over top of El's head and lifted it up like a wedding veil, revealing her beautiful face.

"Am I dreaming right now because it sure feels like I am."

"I don't know, you tell me," she said, kissing him.

Mike reached over towards El's waist and pulled her towards him, spooning her as she pulled the sheet over them and clenched a wad of it in her fist. They both shut their eyes for a moment which later got away from them, as they both nodded off a little until Mike finally came to his senses.

"How about we go for a bike ride, like old times?" he asked her.

"I'd love to."

"Great! Okay, so you sneak out the back door quietly, I'll tell my mom that I'm going to Dustin's. Sound good?"

"Alright."

"Ready?"

"Yes."

interlaces fingers and holds hand

They rushed down the stairs and went in opposite directions. It was cold out, so El put on the jacket Mike gave her. After getting his mom's approval, he hopped on the bike with El and headed towards her cabin. She hugged him tightly from behind, enjoying the closeness, as the wind blew through her longer, curly hair. They finally started coming to a stop. Suddenly, a look of confusion appeared on her face.

"Mike, why are we here?"

"Believe me, El, this is the last place I want you to be right now, but I don't want you to get in trouble like I did. We can hang out here and when Hopper comes home, I'll just tell him it was my idea to come and visit you!"

"Mike, I'm scared...I don't want him to hurt you!"

"Nothing hurts me more than not getting to see you for this long. Besides, if we go anywhere else, we're gonna get in just as much

trouble as we will if we stay here. Better your own home than anywhere else!"

"*smiles* You're right."

smiles back at her and kisses cheek

They walked up to the porch. Without noticing her bloody nose, he asked:

"Do you have a key?"

"Um, *ahem* Mike..."

points to the open door with her eyes

"Oh, right! Duh!"

both laugh

They walked inside and he made her eggos, like old times, figuring that it would be the best way to get all of this off of her mind. They ate them on the couch as they watched "All My Children" together and Mike asked:

"Hey, El?"

turns off tv with her mind

"Yes?"

"I brought this book with me that I think you'd really like. Do you know what a fairy tale is?"

"Yes."

"Well, this book's a fairy tale called 'The Princess Bride.' You want me to read some of it to you?"

"Yes."

"Okay."

Mike decided that he would read it to her, just like how the grandpa read the story to his grandson in the movie. El climbed into Mike's lap and he wrapped his arms around her, their faces so close that he could smell her hair. It smelled like jasmine, he thought. She held the book out so that it was at his eye level and he started reading:

"This is my favorite book in all the world, though I have never read it."

As he continued reading, she took in every word and studied his face. She noticed his long eyelashes, his freckles, the way he licked his lips-God, she thought that was sexy, without actually knowing what sexy meant. *I love this book*, she thought, and she loved how passionate Mike was about it. She loved everything about it, especially how romantic it was. She started to get a little sleepy, so she laid down, her legs lying across his lap, and grabbed a pillow to snuggle with. After reading for about an hour, El interrupted and said:

"Mike. C'mere, I wanna tell you something."

She let go of the pillow, grabbed his shirt, and pulled him down. He twisted his body toward her, one hand on her lower back, the other holding the book. She smiled and raised her eyebrows as she moved closer to him.

"What were you gonna tell m-"

He got distracted by the fact that her finger was running down his chest and their faces were so close that their noses were practically touching.

"Hi."

"Hi."

Her hands were on his cheeks. She leaned in and kissed him with confidence. This took him by surprise, so he threw the book across the room and wrapped his arms around her, kissing her back. This startled her, but she didn't stop kissing him. Nothing could stop her.

Kissing El was great, but Mike was ready for more. He didn't know

how but he knew he wanted to make out with her. Eventually, he broke away from the kiss and said:

"Um, El?"

"Yes, Mike?"

"Do you know what 'making out' means?"

"No. What is 'making out'?"

"'Making out,' it's when you kiss someone for a long period of time and sometimes people open their mouths and the tongues touch. That's called 'french kissing'. People do other things too, but that can wait."

"I wanna try it."

"Okay. I've never done this before either, but I'll start slow, just follow my lead, and tell me if you wanna stop or if you feel uncomfortable, okay?"

"Mike, relax! I'm a big girl, I can handle it."

"And a beautiful one at that!" he said, booping her nose.

smiles and starts kissing her

He started out by kissing her softly and breaking away every few seconds. He lightly stroked her chin with his thumb.

giggles

"Mike, stop it! It tickles."

"Oh, sorry."

both laugh and continue

Her hands slid into his hair, which he loved. He stopped to tuck her hair behind her ears and continued, his hands now moving through *her* hair. She sighed and looked deep into his eyes after they made out for about 4 minutes. She felt all tingly inside.

"Mike, that was...wow."

They both laughed and continued for about 7 more minutes. Mike had already forgotten about the book and El had forgotten about her daddy issues. Without a distraction in the world, they laid there and napped for a while, until she looked at Mike's watch.

"Oh no. Hopper's gonna be home soon and I've barely started my homework..."

"Why didn't you say something? I'll help you!"

"Thanks, Mike."

"No problem."

"I sure hope it's about acute triangles again!" he continued.

laughs

At work, Hopper had drunkenly called Joyce in the middle of the day. She could tell that he had been drinking though and set him straight like his ex-wife did the last time he relapsed. She told him that he was turning into Lonnie and that he needed to get his shit together and be there for his daughter. The difference was that unlike Lonnie, Hopper listened. He spent the rest of the day thinking about what he did wrong, trying to figure out the best way to apologize to El, and sobering up.

By the time Hopper came home, they had already finished working on her homework and even made dinner. El got anxious again when she heard Hopper's knock, but Mike held her hand and opened the door with her.

"Hey, kid."

"H-Hi. *waits* Well, *pauses* are you going to yell at me or what?"

"Yell at you for what?"

"Having Mike over!"

"If you want me to leave, sir, I understand," said Mike.

"No, don't leave, Mike. I want you to hear this from me too. *sighs* I'm not mad at you, El...I'm mad at myself."

long pause, Mike and Eleven exchange looks

"Look, I messed up...I never should've started drinking again."

"You really scared me!"

"I know, kid. I just wasn't thinking clearly and I didn't realize that I was hurting everyone I loved by drinking. So, that's why I'm gonna give it up. For good this time."

"Promise?"

"I promise."

El smiled, let go of Mike's hand, and gave Hopper a big hug, saying:

"I love you!"

"*tears up* I love you too, kid."

Mike was happy that they made up. There was this bad feeling though that he couldn't shake and that feeling was jealousy. He oddly felt a little jealous that she had already said I love you to Hopper and not to him, but he knew that loving your dad was very different from loving your boyfriend because love took many different forms. He knew that these things took time, but what he didn't know was that love was in his near future...

Hopper, El, and Mike all had dinner together and got along well and Joyce followed up with Hopper every now and then to see how he was doing, and sure enough, he kept his promise!

7. Crazy Little Thing Called Love

[February 9th, 1985]

After dinner, Mike and his family decided to watch a movie. It was Nancy's night to pick, so she picked a movie called *Splash*. In this movie, a man runs into a mermaid who saved him from drowning as a child and falls in love with her, without knowing her secret. Ted, of course, fell asleep halfway through the movie, but Mike, on the other hand, found it intriguing. Normally, he would prefer watching a sci-fi movie over a romantic one, but with El on his mind and Valentine's Day just around the corner, he didn't mind it so much.

After saying goodnight to his parents, he went to his room and fell asleep. He then woke up from a dream at 7:30 in the morning. The dream made him look at El in a whole new way and caused him to wrestle with the idea of love. He tossed and turned, with a thought that just wouldn't go away. The more he thought about it, the more it was true. He woke up and he just knew, he just knew that he was in love.

Before El came along, Mike couldn't ever shake the feeling that something was missing from his life. He had an amazing group of friends, loving parents, two sisters, good grades-What more could he ask for? He came to find that she was what he had been missing all along. She was his reason for getting up in the morning. She was always his first thought of the day and his last thought at night. He thought about her twinkling brown eyes, her sprouting curly hair, the way she said his name, her bitchin' powers, the way it felt when her warm hands held his, the way it felt to kiss her soft, sweet lips-He was completely in love with her.

His parents weren't the perfect example of true love by any means and because of that, he always had a hard time understanding how you knew for sure. Love made sense now though, he thought. He had never felt such intensely warm feelings about anyone. He felt this for her all along, but he just didn't know what to do or make of it. He thought about her all the time, but never like this. No, today was different. Today, she was more than just a thought, feeling, or image. She was love.

He felt weird about the whole thing, as most middle schoolers would, and began to obsess over the details. *How should I tell her? When should I tell her? Where should I tell her?* he asked himself. He rubbed his eyes and shook his head, making sure that he was fully awake. Then, he tossed the sheets off his body, hopped out of bed, and headed toward the basement, passing by his mom.

"You're sure up early!" she said.

"What? Oh yeah, I uh woke up from a dream early..."

"Aww, I'm sorry, sweetie! Well, why don't you sit down and I'll make you some breakfast. How does that sound?"

"Um...sure, I just gotta do something real quick."

"Are you alright?"

runs past

"Michael?"

"MICHAEL!" she shouted once again.

He sighed and ran back around the corner.

"Sorry, Mom. Can't talk right now."

"*grasps shoulder* But sweetie, breakfast is almost ready."

"I'll be up in a minute, I swear. I've just gotta do this one-"

"Don't swear. Alright, but I'm timing you," she said, letting go of his shirt.

He shrugged, making his way down the stairs. He didn't really know why he felt the need to go down to the basement in the first place. All he knew was that it was where El had lived, where he came to know her. It was also the place he often came to think and gather his thoughts. He sat down, his eyes traveling to the fort. Then, it came to him! He knew exactly how he would break the news to her. So, he got up out of the chair he was sitting in and climbed inside. *This will*

do, he said to himself, patting the wrinkles out of the sheets.

He then ran upstairs to eat breakfast. Grabbing the eggos out of the toaster, and asked:

"Can I have El over after school on Monday?"

"Of course, sweetie! You know she's always welcome."

"Thanks, Mom. *hugs*"

He then started to walk away, until Mrs. Wheeler stopped him, saying:

"Where are you going?"

"To call El..." he said matter-of-factly.

"Oh. Well, tell her I said hi."

"Will do," he said, walking away.

He picked up the phone and began calling her.

rings

"Hello?"

"Hey..."

"Mike! Hi!" she said, excitedly.

"How's it going?"

"Good, you?"

"Great actually! *pauses* Um, actually, I-I was wondering if um...you were free on Monday?"

"I'm always free, silly!"

"I know, I just meant, well, you know what I meant."

"Yes, I do. *laughs* I'll ask Hopper and call you back in a couple of minutes."

"Okay, talk to you then."

hangs up

Five minutes later, El called him back, saying:

"I'm back. He said I could come!"

"Great!"

"Can't wait! What time?" she asked as she fiddled with the phone cord.

"How 'bout 3:15?"

"Sounds pretty...good."

laughs

long pause

Suddenly, El's voice came seeping from the speaker, asking:

"Mike?"

"Y-Yeah?"

"You seem a little...nervous. Is everything alright?"

"It will be...soon. When I see you."

"*smiles* It's only a couple of days away, but it feels so far from now..." she whined.

"It'll be time before you know it."

"You always say that..."

"And I always mean it."

They continued conversing for another hour until Nancy interrupted them.

"*pushes door open* Mike! Who the hell are you talking to? You're holding up the line!"

"Hold on just a second, El," he whispered into the phone.

"Sorry, I lost track of time."

"Is that El?" asked Nancy.

"Ye-"

"Give me!" she said.

"No, I'm not fini-"

"Hi El," said Nancy.

"Nancy? Is that you?"

"Yes, it's me. How are you?" she said, slapping Mike's hand away.

"Good. How are you?"

"I'm doing just fine, just fine," she said, wrestling Mike for the phone.

pause

"Has my brother been bugging you? I'm sorry he tends to do that," she said, pinning Mike down.

"No, I love talking to him."

"Well, it's good that at least someone does." she joked.

pause

"Say, have I ever told you about the time that I caught Mike trying on my mom's clothes?"

"*giggles* No."

"IT WAS A PHASE!" he yelled in the background, fighting Nancy for the phone.

"Mouthbreather!" he said.

"Asshole!" said Nancy.

Mike pushed her away, getting ahold of the phone once again.

"Sorry, El. My sister was just being a brat."

"Haha, that's okay. *pauses* So...Is it true?"

"Is what true?"

"That you used to dress up in your mom's clothes?"

"Yeah...but I'm not proud of it."

"*laughs* It's not that big a deal...I mean, I used to wear my dad's clothes, but that's because I had to."

"Oh yeah. You looked so cute in those overalls you wore that one time, I mean, you always look cute, but still..."

"Not as cute as you!"

"Agree to disagree?"

"Halfway happy," she said with a smile.

"Well, I should probably let my sister use the phone now. I'll talk to you later, El."

"Okay. Bye Mike!" she said sweetly.

El hung up the phone and plopped onto the bed, holding the Snow Ball pictures close to her chest.

The next day, Mike snuck away to Nancy's room, stealing cash from her once again. He took his money and biked over to the market, where he bought several roses, and to Melvald's where he bought a box of festive lights.

"Got any lights?" he asked.

"Lights?" Donald repeated.

"Yeah, like Christmas lights."

"Well, we may have some in the back. Let me check..."

"Alright, thanks."

A few minutes passed by and Donald came back in no time with one box of lights.

"*sets box down* Last time I checked, it was February. You've been hanging out with Joyce Byers too much, haven't you?" asked Donald.

"*laughs, takes box* No, sir. They're just for a special occasion."

"And that would be...?"

"I'm telling my girlfriend that I love her."

"Ah, I see. Well, she's a very lucky girl!"

"I sure hope so..."

"*pats shoulder* Hang in there, son. You want any advice?"

"Sure, I could use it!"

signals to come closer

leans ear toward

"*whispers* Just be yourself. Speak from the heart, not the ass. That's what I always say!"

"*chuckles* Thank you, sir. That was refreshing!"

"Anytime. Go get her, boy!"

smiles, walks away

By the time Monday had come around, he scattered rose petals leading up to the fort. He then hung a string of lights across the rim of the fort's opening and along the borders of the inside.

He raced to her house, he felt a rush of adrenaline. He was pedaling to the beat of his own heart, knowing that that day, he would be vulnerable with El in a way that he had never been before.

He cut through the wooded area, braking in mid-ride, and throwing his bike onto the ground. He then paced himself, approaching each individual step at a time.

"*sighs* Here we go..." he whispered to himself.

He knocked on the door several times and waited for about 5-10 minutes until he finally decided just to use the key under the mat. When he opened the door, nobody was there. He tried not to assume the worst, that somebody had found and kidnapped her. He knew that there had to be some reasonable explanation as to why she was gone.

He biked home only to find that El had left him a message on the answering machine nearly the minute he left to pick her up, saying that something came up and it turned out that she couldn't hang out with him that day.

Oddly, he was relieved! He now had time to plan out a less cliché date. And with that, he decided to take her to Lovers' Lake for Valentine's Day.

After listening to her message and making Valentine's Day plans, he invited Dustin and Steve over, his only desperately single friends. He let them eat the chocolates that he was originally going to give to El.

"Whoa! These chocolates are amazing..."

"Thanks for letting us crash your date, Wheeler," said Steve.

By the time they left, he sat down for dinner with his parents. His mom then got up to clear the table. As she scraped the leftover food into the garbage can, she noticed 11 petalless rose stems. She pulled them out of the trash can, asking:

"Where did these come from?"

Mike took a spit take once again, wiping the milk off of his knowing smile, as he chuckled to himself.

8. Operation Cupid

It was February 12th, Valentine's Day Eve Eve, and all of the boys were stressing out. Lucas had absolutely no idea what to get Max. She was the kind of person who was always hard to pick a gift out for! She wasn't into the gushy love gifts but still, she was his girlfriend, he had to do something! Will on the other hand, wanted to ask out the girl he danced with at the Snow Ball, but didn't know her name and was incredibly shy when it came to talking to girls in general. Mike, however, had already planned out everything he and El would do together and what he would give her. He wanted to make it special and memorable. Dustin, an adorable, neglected loner, decided to use his charm to his advantage and help the boys out.

"You guys are all so whipped!" said Dustin.

"Are not!"

"Friends don't lie, remember, Lucas?"

"Whatever, I think you're the one that's whipped. You never left Dart's side until we made you! It was getting a little weird, man."

"Oh please! If anyone's whipped, it's Mike. Have you seen the way he looks at El?"

"HEY, I'M RIGHT HERE and it's called love, you mouthbreathers! Look it up!"

"oohs" come from the boys

"Damn, Wheeler! With that attitude, you won't even need El to save your ass when Troy tries to hurt you again!"

all laugh

The boys headed to the cafeteria and sat down at a table together. Max normally sat with them but she was out sick that day. As Dustin and Lucas talked about what to get Max, Mike started daydreaming about El. As he thought about her lovely brown eyes, the song "Brown Eyed Girl" popped into his head. He decided that he would

use it in a mixtape he would make for her. Hopefully, they would even dance to it. He really missed dancing with her! He thought about how good it felt to be with her now, after endlessly thinking about and waiting for her for 353 days. Once he snapped out his daydreaming, he looked over at Will, who was rummaging through the yearbook, trying to find his secret admirer.

"Will, what the hell are you doing?"

"Trying to find that girl."

"Here, let me help you. What grade's she in?"

"10th."

"Ooh, an older woman!"

"Shut up," he said, chuckling.

"She's taller too!"

Mike laughs to himself

"Your point?"

"Oh, nothing...I was just-Wait, is that her?"

sighs

"No."

"Don't worry, Will. We'll find her!"

"I know...She was just different, you know?"

"Yeah..."

"I should probably just give up...What are you doing for Valentine's Day?"

"I'm gonna take El to Lovers' Lake for a picnic."

"Romeo much?"

both giggle

Since they ran out of chocolate pudding in the cafeteria, Dustin headed to the storage closet, where he knew he would find a large supply of pudding cups. A thought occurred to Mike:

"We need to get Dustin a girl, A.S.A.P.!"

"I think all he needs is Dart...okay maybe Steve too," Lucas joked.

all laugh

It was now Valentine's Day. After school, Lucas and Max met up by the bicycle rack. Before they left to see a movie together, Lucas said:

"Max, I'm really glad I met you. You're just a cool girl and you're not like any of the other girls here. I know you feel like you can't ever compete with El because you think that her powers give her an edge, but you're just as unique as she is. I really like you and-"

kisses him

"Are you ever gonna let me kiss you first?" Lucas asked.

"*giggles* Oops...?"

"C'mere."

He pulled her in for another kiss and put the beanie he had specially made for her on her head. It had "MADMAX" written across the top of it and "Zoomer" on the back. She pulled away from the kiss and took it off to look at it.

"Awww, Lucas! I love it! It's gonna make my gift seem a lot more cliché now though..."

pulls beanie out of overall pocket

"It stays 'Stalker' and 'Ranger' on it too? Wow. Great hearts think alike."

"That's the cheesiest thing I've ever heard, but you're still cute."

smiles

Mike, on the other hand, had immediately left to pick up El. When she heard him walking toward her house, she opened the door and walked out onto the porch, putting on her pastel pink moto jacket.

El was someone who felt lost without people. All she ever knew was what it felt like to be alone and she was ready to explore the world of family, friendship, and most importantly, love. But alas, Mike was there and that chronic feeling of loneliness was no more.

"Mike! Watch out for the-"

BANG!

"Tripwire..." she finished.

She ran over to him as fast as she could in her kitten heels.

"Are you okay?" she asked as she helped him up.

Even just the sight of El was enough to make Mike swoon, but the feeling of her forehead resting against his with her nose nuzzled into his cheek, and her lips moving in agreement with his was one that he could never turn down or resist. It was a feeling far more magical than any other and he couldn't wait to kiss her more.

"Yeah, I'm fine. Thanks," he said. "Wow, you look amazing!"

"Thanks," she said with a blushy, shy smile.

"Well, shall we?" he asked.

"Sure, but I had something else in mind first..."

"Oh yeah?"

She took off her jacket and threw both of her jacket arms behind his neck. She then held onto them and pulled his face closer to her as she said:

"*bats eyelashes* I wanna try french kissing."

"Okay, are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Alright, so it's probably gonna feel a little different, but it supposed to feel like that. I've never done this either. Just open your mouth when we're about to-"

She smiled and leaned in. Right before their lips met, she opened her mouth. He also leaned in and when their lips met, he lightly caressed his tongue with hers for several seconds then pulled away.

"What'd you think?"

"Different, but good different. I like it."

"Me too."

This time she set the pace. She leaned in and they kissed passionately for several minutes.

Then, Mike felt a swift rush of adrenaline and picked her up, put her up against one of the outdoor stair posts, and kissed her passionately. She loved how Mike could be so gentle, but so bold. She felt so safe in his company.

Eventually, they both pulled away and Mike then said:

"You up for a bike ride?"

"To where?"

"It's a surprise..."

She smiled and hopped on.

On the way there, he pulled his walkman out of the basket on Nancy's old bike and handed it to El.

"This is called a walkman. It plays music."

"Ooh, I like music!"

"I know you do, that's why I made you a mixtape!"

"A mixtape?"

"It's like a tape that you make for someone that has a bunch of different songs on it. I thought you would like these songs."

"*kisses cheek* Thanks, Mike."

"*smiles* Well, are you going to play it or not?"

smiles

She listened to it for the remainder of the bike ride, the last song being Brown Eyed Girl.

"Hey, where did we go?

Days when the rains came

Down in the hollow

Playin' a new game

Laughing and a running hey, hey

Skipping and a jumping

In the misty morning fog with

Our hearts a thumpin' and you

My brown-eyed girl

You, my brown-eyed girl

Whatever happened

To Tuesday and so slow?

Going down the old mine

With a transistor radio.

*Standing in the sunlight laughing
Hiding behind a rainbow's wall
Slipping and a-sliding
All along the waterfall, with you
My brown-eyed girl
You, my brown-eyed girl
Do you remember when we used to sing
Sha la la la la la la la la la te da
Just like that
Sha la la la la la la la la la te da la te da.
So hard to find my way
Now that I'm all on my own
I saw you just the other day
My, how you have grown!
Cast my memory back there, Lord,
Sometime I'm overcome thinking 'bout
Making love in the green grass
Behind the stadium with you
My brown-eyed girl,
You, my brown-eyed girl
Do you remember when we used to sing
Sha la la la la la la la la la te da*

Sha la la la la la la la la la te da la te da

Sha la la la la la la la la la te da la te da."

She loved this song. It was upbeat, but still had a way of calming her. When they had arrived, she handed the walkman back to Mike, saying:

"Mike, this is so sweet. Thank you!"

"Of course! I had to play it for my brown-eyed girl!" he said with a wink.

At first, she blushed, but then a look of confusion projected onto her face, one that Mike was very familiar with by now.

"Where are we?"

"Lovers' Lake."

TO BE CONTINUED...  

9. News Flash! Murray Saves Mileven!

Hey y'all. This is a LONG one, so my apologies for that. I just thought this would be a funny chapter because I honestly love Murray's character, so I got a little off track with the whole Mileven theme, BUT there is a really cute part in it that relates to them and yes, this is the "To Be Continued Chapter" for Brown Eyed Girl, so do not fret my fellow Mileven shippers! 😊 Let me know what you think. Toodles! 🙌

Murray Bauman woke up at precisely 5:30 a.m. and spent most of his day getting ready for his interview at the Hawkins Post Newspaper. Not a lot of people knew Murray well, most people just ignored him or dismissed his crazy theories. What they didn't know was that he used to work for the Chicago Sun-Times, but quit when his family was destroyed as he tried to uncover his biggest story yet...but that was in Chicago, Illinois. This was in Hawkins, Indiana, a much safer area of the midwest, well, if you don't count the demogorgons!

He had been waiting for this day ever since he became a true conspiracy theorist. This was it, he thought. This was the way to get people to listen to him and believe him. Hopper saw to it that no one would ever hire Murray as a private investigator again, so this was his last chance to really get through to people. Though the other journalists were skeptical, they hired him. They were desperate for a new scoop, something, anything....Just some excitement in this town that wasn't related to all the deaths resulting from the loose interdimensional monsters coming from the Upside Down.

Once news of the new news reporter, Murray Bauman, hit the streets, Hopper was naturally pissed as hell. By the time he heard that Murray's first story involved his teenage daughter and her boyfriend, he really lost his shit!

Murray went off of a hunch that there was something going on between Mike and El. He had already invested lots of time into his theory about El being connected to the Russians, but once that rumor was debunked, he decided to learn more about her friends. First, he contacted Nancy, whom he already had on speed dial.

"Hello?" said Nancy.

"Nancy darling, it's Murray, Murray Bauman!"

"Hah, Murray Bauman! It's been a while. Heard that you're a news reporter now, is that true?"

"Yes, in fact, I'm working on my first story right now...That's why I called."

"Oh?"

"Yep! So, when can I interview you?"

"Um...Well, I'm free after school, but if you could get me out of fourth period, you'd be my hero!"

"Writing your teacher a note as we speak...I've got to motor on over in that area of town anyway!"

"Great! So, what am I even being interviewed about?"

"I can't say...I can't risk the government listening in on our conversation and using it against me! Those CNN reporters will steal my story like it's their job!"

"*laughs* Well, if it's that important, I don't think I'd be of much help..."

"It's related to you my dear, just trust me, and remember, I'm getting you out of class!"

"Right, right! Thank you...Okay, I'm sorry, one last question..."

"Yes?"

"Didn't you banish me and Jonathan from your house last time we came?"

"I don't recall...but how 'bout you bring him along too? I could use his input as well...assuming you two are still together."

"Not that it's any of your business, Murray, although...you are kind of

the reason we got together in the first place, but yes, we are still together and I will ask him."

"Splendid! Well, you better be going to school now! Toodles!"

"By-*gets hung up on*"

laughs

She then called Jonathan and got him on board. Around that same time, Murray met the two at school to hand them their notes and a few hours later, they drove to his house for their interview.

"Please sit, sit. Make yourselves comfortable!" said Murray with a wink.

"So, Murray, what's this story about?"

"Why the rush, Nance?"

"Because our parents don't know that we skipped class, so we have to come home at the regular time as if we just came from school."

"Well, I guess you have a point there...Okay, I'll stop stalling. Here's the deal, as you know, I am a news reporter now, so I feel that it is my responsibility to be in the loop about everything...EVERYTHING. It is also my responsibility to debunk all rumors and follow up about old ones. One of them involves your beloved brother, Mike."

"I'm listening..."

"What do you know about him and Eleven?"

"They're together. End of story."

"Ah, ah, ah, not so fast...What do you know about Lovers' Lake, you two?"

"Lovers' Lake, did you say?" asked Nancy.

"Doesn't ring a bell..." Jonathan added.

"Oh, like you two don't know where it is...There's the first lie of the

afternoon!"

"Fine, we've been there before...What does this have to do with Mike and El?" said Jonathan.

"Well, Mrs. Humphrey saw some unusual activity around the evening that Nancy's brother took Hopper's daughter out on a date."

"How'd she know it was them? She's an old woman, surely she could've mistaken them for some other people," Jonathan pointed out.

"Because she recognized Mike's watch sitting on the picnic blanket, as well as the sweater she knit him."

"Okay, but why was she there in the first place?"

"She was picking berries to make a pie for her grandson."

"Okay, that's fair...I guess the next question is what kind of unusual activity did she see exactly?" asked Nancy.

"Hey, I'm the one asking the questions here, but for your information, Mrs. Humphrey saw Mike walking on water."

"*takes a sip of water, spits out* I'm sorry, what? Like Jesus?" Nancy asked, chuckling.

"Well, I for one don't believe in such nonsense as a god, but I'll humor you...Yes, like Jesus."

"Well, that's impossible!" said Jonathan.

"Not necessarily...You remember when the grocer at Melvald's reported seeing Eleven shatter a door with her mind. She could probably help Mike walk on water if she really is capable of shattering a door with her mind."

"Murray, I'm warning you, back off!" said Nancy.

"Why so touchy Nancy?"

"Because if you're about to expose Eleven to all of Hawkins, then I'm going to have to stop you. If you do this, you will not only hurt El, but you will destroy my family like you did your own, and I can't risk that."

"Ouch, you cut me deep...Oh, Nancy, I would never dream of such a thing! I was simply going to suggest that we somehow cover this story up so that Mrs. Humphrey stops questioning me about it and to make sure that Eleven is off the radar and out of the public eye for a while."

"Oh, well, I'm glad that we're both on the same page then, but how can we do that? We don't even know what actually happened that day."

"No, we don't, but I think I might know how we can find out...Can you give Nancy and I a sec?" asked Jonathan.

"Sure," said Murray.

"*whispers to Nancy* You once told me that you stole your brother's diary to get back at him for stealing your bike and swimsuit without asking and you found out that he was in love with El, right?"

"Yeah...What's your point?"

"Well, clearly he writes a lot about him and El together, so I'm saying maybe he wrote about that day. I mean, walking on water, that's a pretty memorable experience!"

"That's genius!"

"So, is that a yes?"

"*brief pause* Okay, I'm in. Let's tell Murray!"

"Alright. So, Jonathan and I were talking, and we think it makes sense to skim his diary and see what he mentioned about that day."

"Excellent idea, even I didn't think of that! Alright, meet me back here at 4:30. I'm giving you two 30 extra minutes to yourselves...You'll thank me later!" he said with a smirk.

"Sounds like a plan! See you then, Mur." said Jonathan.

"Bye now!" said Murray.

Jonathan and Nancy made it back to the Wheeler household as if they had just come home from school.

"MOM, I'M HOME!" Nancy yelled.

"Hey, Sweetie," said Mrs. Wheeler, walking from the kitchen.

"Jonathan! It's been a while. *smiles* Would you like to stay for dinner tonight?" asked Mrs. Wheeler.

"I'd love to if that's okay with Nancy of course..."

"Are you kidding? Of course I want you to."

"Wonderful! Well, I'm making my famous pot roast tonight...Does that suit you?"

"Pot roast sounds amazing, Mrs. Wheeler, thanks."

"Well, Mom, I just came to get my roller skates because we're gonna meet up with some friends at the roller rink for a while if that's okay..."

"Yeah, sure, just make it back here by 6:30, I wouldn't want for your pot roast to get cold."

"*chuckles* Don't worry, Mom, we will."

"Alright then, well, I won't keep you waiting. You kids have fun!"

"Thanks, Mrs. Wheeler," said Jonathan.

She then nodded and walked away. Luckily, Mike was staying after for A.V. Club that day, so this would be much easier than any other day. Nancy and Jonathan went up to his room and spent at least 15 minutes trying to find it.

"My brother's a smart kid...This isn't going to be easy."

"Mike's a sensitive guy, like me and Will. My instincts tell me that he would hide it somewhere that no one would ever touch or think to look. So, where do you think that might be?"

"I don't know, I don't know...Wait a minute...that floorboard looks awfully loose to me," said Nancy as she lifted it up.

"Floorboard. Classic hiding place," said Jonathan.

"He said it happened earlier this month, right?"

"Yeah, that's what I heard him say," said Jonathan.

Nancy flipped through the pages, mumbling "February 8th, Ferbruary 9th, February 10th, February 11th...Huh!"

"What is it, Nance?"

"Nothing, I was just sure that it would be the 11th. He's so intentional about everything he does, so I figured that he would pick the 11th to go on a romantic outing with his girlfriend, *Eleven*, but I guess not!"

"Maybe he took her out on Valentine's Day."

"Oh, I bet you're right...Let's see, 12th, 13th, 14th...Bingo! Found it."

The entry for that day read:

"Dear Diary,

Today I took El out to Lovers' Lake for Valentine's Day. It just seemed like the perfect place to tell her that I love her and I figured that today would be the perfect day to do it. So, I snuck her out of the house this evening on Nancy's bike because it had a basket that could hold the picnic blanket and the basket of food itself. In the basket were heart-shaped eggos and some other food that El liked.

She looked absolutely beautiful! She wore this black and white, gingham dress and a pink motorcycle jacket that just made me want to swoon...Her hair looked straighter than normal and had bows in it, but it was still curly at the ends. By the end of the night, my face was covered with her red lipstick, so that was pretty awkward when my mother saw it later on

that night...

I told her to bring a swimsuit, but she said she didn't have one because she had never been swimming before, so I took it upon myself to teach her. I told her not worry because I would bring one of Nancy's swimsuits for her to wear. Before we swam, we had dinner and talked for about an hour. Then, I took off my shirt and pulled my pants off of my swim trunks. When I took off my shirt, she put her hands over her eyes as a reflex, probably remembering the time that I had prevented her from taking her shirt off in front of me and Dustin and Lucas when I let her borrow my clothes. When she uncovered her eyes, it was clear that she had never seen a guy shirtless before, thankfully! She was curious as to why my chest looked different than hers. She asked me why. Sure, it was awkward, but I didn't mind explaining it to her. I tried to explain it the best that I could, making sure to avoid any follow-up questions about where babies come from...I definitely didn't want to have THAT conversation with my girlfriend!

Before she started changing into her bathing suit, she asked me what the bikini top was for if people swam shirtless anyway. I explained to her that only guys swam without shirts on and how bikini tops were like bras. She then started changing. I turned around to respect her privacy but helped her tie it in the back when she was done. We then walked into the water together, our hands around each other's waists.

When the lake got deep, her first instinct was to grab onto my shoulders. I let her get used to treading the water with her legs. When I taught her how to float on her stomach, I told her to try paddling her arms toward me and kicking her legs as she moved. I assured her that I wasn't going anywhere and that if she started going under I would catch her, even though she could probably catch herself with her powers. She did suspend me from falling off of a cliff after all!

The first time she almost went under, but I caught her and brought her towards my chest, telling her it would be okay and encouraging her to try again. She tried several more times and with each time, she got better. I gradually moved farther away from her, letting her come to me. After a while, she finally got the hang of it without my help! I was so proud of her and she was so happy. She jumped into my arms and kissed me passionately. I can't wait to swim with her again during the summer, but this time in front of other people.

El showed me all of the water tricks she could do with her powers. She made bubbles, waves, fountains, and figures. She actually splashed me with her mind, which turned into a big splash fight that I of course lost. After that, I got out of the lake to dry off while she stayed in to test more ways that she could manipulate the water. As I was drying my hair with a towel, she mentioned how cute my hair looked when it was spiked up, but when I turned around, she wasn't wading in the water, she was WALKING ON IT!

I was speechless! I explained to her that this was a miracle and that nobody could do that except for her and maybe Jesus. It was funny that she figured out how to walk on water because I learned how to make oobleck in my science class recently, and had thought of how you could technically walk on water if you turned a kiddie pool into oobleck, which is basically just water mixed with cornstarch. She asked if I wanted to try it. This was so much better than oobleck! I can't wait to rub it in the other guys' faces.

I walked toward the sand and levitated on top of the water. I couldn't believe it! I was walking on water. I walked toward her and kissed her as she did me. This felt like the right moment, so when we both pulled away from the kiss, I placed a dangling strand of hair behind her ear and told her I loved her. At first, she looked shocked, but that look of shock slowly turned into a beautiful smile and she brought my face close to hers and whispered that she loved me too. We made out for quite a bit until she was so into it that she lost her grip on the both of us and we fell underwater. Both of our heads popped up at the same time, with her still in my arms as we both laughed.

By the time we got back onto shore, another hour had passed and we were EXHAUSTED. We decided to just dry off and snuggle, so we did. About a half an hour later, we got to see the sunset. It was pink, orange, and purple all over.

Today was so wonderful, perfect even, and I will never forget it.

Sincerely,

Mike"

"Wow, he's SO detailed. He tells it like a story..."

"Guess that makes sense...He is the dungeon master after all!"

"Haha, right. Well, this is plenty of material to work with. Let's get out of here!" she said, hiding the diary in her backpack.

They were 15 minutes late to Murray's house. He let them in anyway and said:

"Well, well, well, if it isn't Fred and Daphne! Solving mysteries just isn't enough for you two, is it? You had to bump uglies too!"

"No, no, that's not why we're late! You see, my brother is really good at hiding things, so it took a while to find it."

"Whatever you say!"

"It's time to end this Eleven investigation once and for all!"

"That's the spirit, Nancy. *pours three glasses of watery vodka* To watering it down! *raises glass*"

"To watering it down!" Nancy and Jonathan said in unison as they both clinked their glasses with Murray's.

"Well, what are we waiting for? Let's hear it!" said Murray.

"Hah! It's like a gazillion pages long, I'll just skip around to the important parts."

"Don't worry, Nancy, I love a good story!"

"Dear Diary,

Today I took El out to Lovers' Lake for Valentine's Day. It just seemed like the perfect place to tell her that I love her and I figured that today would be the perfect day to do it. So, I snuck her out of the house this evening on Nancy's bike because it had a basket that could hold the picnic blanket and the basket of food itself. In the basket were heart-shaped eggos and some other food that El liked."

Murray interrupted her and said: "Interesting...He's like a serial romantic, he plans out his romantic outings to the very last detail."

Nancy and Jonathan laugh

"Okay, so it looks like he taught her how to swim and she showed him some water tricks she could do with her powers, including walking on water, which looks like it will be hard to cover up, but then he says that he learned how to make oobleck in science class, which by adding a little cornstarch to a body of water, you could potentially walk on water with. I just don't know if we can cover this up, Murray..."

"Sure we can, Nancy! Let me refill your glass, it'll calm your nerves."

"*sips* Thanks, Murray. I feel a lot better now!"

"Of course. Now look, Nancy, we can easily cover this up! That oobleck thing, that's a goldmine for our news story! We'll just say that the two were spotted at Lovers' Lake, testing out Mike's theory of walking on water with a science experiment. We can even add that their friends were there too and add some quotes. All I need you to do, Nancy, is get the kids in on it and have them reenact it with the oobleck this time for a picture and quotes, just so that the public will believe them."

"Murray, that's genius! We'll get right to it. Thank you!"

"No need to thank me, just get me the photo and quotes soon! I have a deadline in two days, you know!"

"Got it, we'll be back tomorrow with the photo and quotes," said Jonathan.

That same night, Nancy and Mike fought over the diary while Jonathan was there eating supper with them.

"Has anyone seen my journal?" Mike asked.

"What journal? You mean your diary, son?" said Ted.

"For the 500th time, it's a JOURNAL!"

"Journal, shmournal...Stop acting like such a big baby!" said Nancy.

"Nancy, did you have something to do with this?" said Karen.

She put her head down in shame and said:

"Yes, *looks up* I'm sorry, Mike."

"YOU BITCH!" he said, hurtling toward his sister.

"LANGUAGE!" Ted exclaimed.

"MICHAEL! We have a guest! Even if we didn't, you know better than that...You apologize to your sister right this instant!"

"Isn't she the one who should be apologizing? She stole my journal!"

"Regardless, you should never call someone a bitch. Say you're sorry!"

"¡Lo ciento no lo ciento!" he said angrily.

"Asswipe!" said Nancy.

"What? What'd he say?" Karen asked.

Nancy and Mike were both taking Spanish, so he said "Sorry not sorry" in Spanish to fool his parents, but still send the message to Nancy that he was not a happy camper.

"He said 'Sorry not sorry!' in Spanish, the asshole..." said Nancy.

"That's it! I've had enough of the two of you, so you can go to your rooms *takes Nancy's plate* and think about what you did. *takes Mike's plate* When you're both ready to make up, *places plates in fridge, then faces the kids* you can have your dinner back."

"But Mom-" said Nancy.

"No buts! Up you go, both of you!" she said.

"Wait, Nancy, I think I'll get going. Call me later, okay?"

nods and kisses

Mike and Nancy both stomped up the stairs angrily. Mike slammed

his bedroom door and locked it. Though Nancy was not quite as mad as Mike, she still went into her room, but only because the diary was there and she wanted to return it to him and explain why she took it. She waited a couple of seconds and then knocked on the door.

"GO AWAY!" Mike yelled.

"Look, Mike, I just wanna talk and give you back your journal, okay. Just please let me in."

"Fine," he said, opening the door.

"You know how protective I am of my stuff. Journals are journals for a reason. They're meant to be private and to help you let out your feelings. You promised me that you wouldn't do it again the last time you took it." said Mike.

"Just hear me out, I didn't want to take your journal, honest, and I only read one entry anyway."

"Then why'd you do it in the first place?"

"It's a long story, but you know that conspiracy theorist and private investigator that I told you I met with last year about Barb?"

"Yeah...?"

"Well, like I said, he used to be a private investigator, but when he couldn't help the Hollands find out what happened to Barb, he was fired, also because he got on Hopper's last nerve. *chuckles* Recently though, he was hired as a journalist for the local newspaper."

"So...?"

"So, he called me up saying that he wanted to interview both me and Jonathan. When we came over to his place, he told us about how Mrs. Humphrey had seen some unusual activity around Lovers' Lake on the day that you took Eleven out there. I made sure that she was sure it was you guys and he said that she saw your watch and the sweater she knitted you both on the picnic blanket. I also asked him what kind of unusual activity she saw and he said she saw you walking on water. "

"Shit! This is bad...This is SO bad!"

"I know, and at first I thought that he was going to write a newspaper article about it, but really all he wanted to do was cover it up and throw people off the trail. So, Jonathan suggested that we check your diary to see if there were any loopholes in Mrs. Humphrey's story that could be explained with your entry for that day. Anyway, that's why I took your journal."

"Okay, that's a legit reason I guess...but PLEASE tell me that this wasn't all for nothing and that you actually were able to figure out how to cover this up."

"Yes, we were. You know that part where you talked about the walking on water with oobleck?"

"Yeah."

"Well, instead of you walking on water with the help of Eleven's powers, he's going to twist the story a little and say that your friends were also there and that you guys brought a kiddie pool to fill up with Lake Water for a science experiment. Then, you guys poured cornstarch in it, mixed it up, and each took turns. It's all tied up in a nice little bow, isn't it? Plus, it makes Mrs. Humphrey look like the bad guy in this situation, the crazy old lady who cried wolf!"

"Brilliant!"

"I think so too. *sighs* Well, anyway, sorry for taking your journal and calling you an asswipe and an asshole. You're not really an asswipe and an asshole, just sometimes!"

"*chuckles* I guess I deserved that...It's okay though, Nance. Thanks for saving my ass, it really means a lot."

"Anytime little bro," she said, tousling his hair.

"And for what it's worth, I'm sorry that I said you were a bitch. That was uncalled for," said Mike.

"Well, I appreciate that," she said.

She began walking out the door but walked back into his room just before he could shut the door.

"What is it now?" he said.

"I almost forgot to tell you that you have to reenact the stretched version of the story for a photo and quotes tomorrow, so make sure to get your friends in on it too."

"I don't know whether to hug you or kill you."

She then left the room, laughing over Mike's comment.

The next day, the kids, Jonathan, and Nancy all met up at Lovers' Lake with a camera, a notepad & pen, a kiddie pool, cornstarch, a picnic basket & blanket, and a bike. At first, they were dreading doing this because they were afraid that it wouldn't work or that someone might see them again, but after a while, those negative thoughts drifted away and they were able to enjoy themselves. It was a science experiment after all, which all of the boys loved, and it also involved acting, which Will and Dustin both loved. Nancy got a quote from both Max and Lucas, where Max talked about how totally tubular it was and Lucas explained the logic behind it and praised Mike's creative idea. Jonathan then got a picture of Mike and Eleven both standing in the oobleck pool, holding each other, and smiling, nose-to-nose. Before they cleaned up and left, each of them tried it out for fun.

The article was published in the Hawkins Post the next day and once it got in Hopper's hands, he immediately went into Dad mode and pulled the two aside the first chance he got. To him, his daughter and her boyfriend being written about in the newspaper was the equivalent of them being featured in a Playboy magazine!

"So, I saw your little newspaper article..." he said to the kids.

"Oh, you did, did you?" Mike asked nervously.

"Mmmhm, and while most of the people in this town are dumb enough to believe this shit and get a kick out of it, I can see right through it."

"What do you mean?" asked El.

"It's obvious that you levitated him on top of the lake water and someone caught you, so you had to make something up to explain it before the rumor spread all around town that you have powers!"

"Oh, he's good!" said Mike, looking Eleven straight in the eyes and nodding.

El playfully hits Mike

"What?" Mike asked with a shrug.

"This isn't a joke! This is serious...You guys need to be more careful! This is a very fragile, sticky situation and we can't risk people finding out anything more about El other than the fact that she's my adopted daughter who's dating *points at Mike* you!" said Hopper.

"You're right, sir. It won't happen again. Promise!" Mike said.

El's eyes traveled to Mike, knowing that whenever he made a promise, he would keep it, no matter what it was or who it was to.

"Alright then...And as for you, El, I'm forbidding you from using your powers in public from now on, unless you're completely alone. Is that understood?"

"Understood," she replied.

"Good. Well, in that case, let's order some pizza, how does that sound?"

"Delicious!" said Mike.

"Delicious? Something can't *sound* delicious, Mike, it can only taste delicious!" said El.

Hopper and Mike laugh

"I've taught her well," Mike said.

"If teaching her how to be a smartass is teaching her well, then good

job, son," Hopper replied.

Mike laughs

"Well, this smartass is hungry and she's going to order everyone a pizza, so I'd be quiet if I were you!" she said.

Hopper and Mike both exchanged glances in awe. While El was on the phone, Hopper talked to Mike, saying:

"You know, Mike, I don't mean to be so hard on you all the time, I'm just really protective of my little girl."

"I know that."

"Well, good. You're a good boy, Mike."

puts arm around him and pats shoulder

Mike smiles

The next day, Hopper confronted Murray, but this time, he wasn't nearly as patient as he was with Mike and Eleven. Murray walked into his office after being called in. He sat down, knowing what his fate would be.

"I've got 6 words for you... 'Water Walking Fun At Lovers' Lake'."

checks watch Well, it looks like I better get going then...Bye!"

"Not so fast!"

Hopper jumped out of his chair, pushed the door shut with his shoe, and grabbed Murray by the shirt collar.

"What have I told you about messing with my family?"

"Well, you-"

"That's right, I paid you \$500 to keep quiet, yet you seem so interested in the love life of my daughter! Why?"

"I was trying to protect her like you asked!"

"The next time you hear a rumor about my daughter and her powers, you come to ME first! Not Nancy, not Jonathan, not Mike, not my daughter herself, ME! Where was the supervision, huh? Where was my okay for you to write a newspaper article about my daughter? Last time I checked, she was underaged and required to have a guardian approve of such a thing."

"You're right, you're right, I'm sorry, I wasn't thinking..."

"You're damn right you weren't thinking! Just stay away from me and my family and we'll be good, okay Murray?"

"Yes, Chief."

"Good," he said, letting go of his shirt collar, and patting it back into place.

And with that, Murray took off. Officer Callahan peered into Hopper's office and said:

"Damn, I think you made him soil himself!"

Officer Powell laughed from his desk at the comment.

As for Mrs. Humphrey, she always forgot to pick her newspaper out of the yard, but when her husband convinced her to read this one in particular, she decided to do so. Surprised by the fact that what she thought she saw by Lovers' Lake was "all in her head," she said to her husband:

"You're right, honey, I am seeing things that aren't really there!"

10. Whipped Like Cream

Hopper was so caught up at work that he didn't come home until the next morning. Mike had called El, to see if she wanted to get together. She picked up the phone and said:

"Hello?"

"Hey, El, it's me."

"Hey, me!"

"*laughs* You're so cute! *pauses* How's your day been so far?"

"Not good, until you called."

"Aww, that's sweet, but why's it been bad?"

"He's been gone all day, Mike. I'm scared that he's in danger, but I can't risk leaving the house to save him."

"Hopper? Geez."

pauses

"El?"

"Yeah?"

"I'll meet you there in an hour, okay? We can wait for him together."

"Have I ever told you how much I love you?"

"I love you too!"

hangs up

Neither of them liked waiting around. El was pacing around the room. Meanwhile, Mike was biking over to her house as fast as he could. When he got there, he knocked on the door. Mike had created his own special knock for them. In morse code, it meant 'El.' He chose this since he was the one who gave her the nickname. When she

heard the knock, she ran out to the porch, where he caught her in a hug. Her tears fell on his shoulder one by one as he stroked her long hair. He put her face into his hands and leaned his head against hers, their noses almost touching. He wiped away her tears and said:

"Everything's gonna be okay, I promise."

They both smiled and walked into the house together, their arms holding each other's backs. Then, they sat down, their elbows leaning against the couch and turned to talk to each other. He put a warm blanket on her.

"You want some coffee?"

"I've never tried it before."

"Well, there's a first time for everything! I'll make you some."

He patted her leg and got up to make some for her. She sat and watched him with a smile. She didn't realize how long it took to make, so she walked over to him after about 3 minutes. She hopped onto the counter and took out a whipped cream bottle and a container of strawberries out from the refrigerator. She had developed a liking for them after Hopper put them on her waffles every now and then. She opened her mouth, Mike thinking that she wanted to make out with him, but really she just did it to squirt whipped cream in her mouth. He chuckled as he fixed himself a snack. He loved how much of a messy eater she was.

"Hey, Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Let's make out!"

"Okay!"

He was still standing, while she was sitting on the countertop, her back leaning against the cabinet. When she sat on the countertop, she was just as tall as he was, their eyes at the same level. He leaned in for a kiss, but all of a sudden, she pulled out the whipped cream and sprayed him in the mouth and on his face. She giggled, jumped off

the counter, and ran. He spat it out and wiped a bit of it off his face. Then, he chased after her. She was really fast, having run from the bad men all her life, and Mike, not being athletic at all, had trouble keeping up with her. She used her powers to distract him. Sometimes she would shove a chair in front of him. Most of the time he jumped over it like a hurdle, but he managed to trip over the last one. She made sure he was okay before she kept running. Finally, Mike saw her turn a corner. He swept her off her feet and caught her in his arms. She let out a playful scream.

"Ha! I got you!"

He tickled her and she continued to spray him. He ran with her still in his arms, over to her bed, and plopped her and himself down. They were really out of breath but were rolling on the bed laughing. Mike was really flustered.

"I still have whipped cream all over my face, you goof!"

She thought that the way his face looked when he called her a goof was so funny and she laughed at the sight. Then, her face turned serious.

"I can take care of that..."

smiles

El kissed him all over his face, coming back to his lips every now and then. At one point, she got it on her nose and rubbed it against his as they both smiled. After making out for a while, Mike said:

"This is perfect!"

"What is?"

"Being here, with you-I've never heard you laugh or scream so much!"

"Awww, stop it, you're gonna make me blush!"

blushes

"Dammit, Wheeler!"

laughs

"El, you have no idea how adorable you are!"

smiles

"Oh, Mike!"

kisses cheek

"Oh shit! I just realized that the coffee's probably cold by now! We should go heat it up."

"Let's just heat it up later!"

"Fine by me."

smiles

They snuggled and took a nap for about half an hour. Mike woke up first and kissed her neck until she eventually did the same. Her eyes started to open. She yawned, stretched out her arms, and turned around to kiss him back.

"Can you fix me that coffee you promised now?"

"Sure! Wait here."

He came back and handed it to her.

"Here you go! Be careful now! It's hot and it can burn your tongue if you're not careful."

"I can handle it. I could always cool it down with my powers if it was too hot anyway."

"True..."

sips

"So, what do you think?"

"Mmm...Delicious!"

"Good, I'm glad you like it!"

Later on, Mike and El had watched E.T. Hopper had been gone all night and they fell asleep to it as they snuggled on the couch. They woke up to the sound of beeping, coming from the receiver.

"Did we fall asleep? What time is it?"

"11:00," she said with a wink.

"*laughs* Of course it is!"

El got up and tried to figure out what Hopper was saying.

"C."

"O."

"M."

"I."

"N."

"G."

"Coming."

Mike thought it was so cute the way that El spoke out each letter. His mom had gotten more uptight about him leaving the house. She even gave him a curfew of 10:00. He was really scared because he had never missed it before without getting her permission first, except for the night that El had closed the gate. He decided to do the responsible thing and call her.

"El, can I use your phone?"

"Sure."

Mrs. Wheeler had waited in the living room for him all night. She was worried sick and even called Hopper. That was part of the reason why he was on the way home, to check and see if Mike was over there.

"Hello?"

"Mom, it's Mike."

"Oh my god, Michael! Where the hell have you been?!"

"I'm so sorry, Mom. El and I fell asleep watching a movie. It won't happen again, I promise!"

"You had me worried sick! You never came home last night! You missed your curfew and I waited for you all night."

"Really? Gosh, Mom. I'm really sorry."

"It's okay, Michael. Just do better next time, okay? And you come home right now, mister!"

"On my way, Mom. Love you!"

"Love you too!"

hangs up

"Mike, thank you so much! I wish you could stay here all day, but I think it's best that you're not here when he comes home. I don't think he would be too happy."

"Yeah, good call. My mom's already gonna kill me for not coming home last night, so I'll see you later!"

He leaned in to kiss her and left.

Hopper took that whole day off to spend with El. When he got home, he found El listening to a record by The Police, which Nancy gave to her. He never had much of a liking for the newer pop music though, as he was more of an old school kind of guy.

"Hey, kid."

"You're late, *pauses* really late."

"I know, I know...I got caught up at work...I'm real sorry, kid."

"You should've called...I was worried about you!"

"Do you think I like leaving you here by yourself all day? *grunts* Will you turn that crap off? It's giving me a headache!"

"*grunts and sighs* Fine..."

He noticed that she was drinking coffee.

"Hey, what are you doing? You're too young to be drinking that!"

"Mike fixed it for me. Well, you never said that was a rule and whenever I try to talk to you in the morning, you always say 'Mornings are for coffee and contemplation!'"

"Wheeler was here?! Karen called me wondering where he was."

"Yeah, he was here. We fell asleep when we were watching E.T., so he didn't get home 'til just now."

This made him nervous, but he let it slide.

"Okay. Well, anyway, coffee will keep you up all night if you drink it too late."

"You're forgetting that I can put myself to sleep."

"You can?"

"Yes! *chuckles* Stop worrying about me, Dad. I'll be fine."

"Dad?' Did you just call me 'Dad?'"

"Yeah, *chuckles* I guess I did."

"Aww. C'mere, kid."

He brought her in for a big hug and kissed her head.

"I love you, kid."

"I love you too, Dad."

pauses

"Dad?"

"Yes?"

"How much longer do I have to hide from the bad men?"

"I don't know, Kid, I don't know...Probably about 9 more months, and I know that's not what you wanna hear, but that's the best we can do right now."

"Okay."

"I'm making progress with these people. I'm interviewing and negotiating with them. I think things could change *pauses* soon."

She crossed her arms and looked out the window, hoping that things would look up soon. They ended the night by watching her favorite soap opera, All My Children, which Hopper suffered through.

11. Love Is In The Air

It was March 9th, 1985. Mike, El, Lucas, and Max had all decided to go on a double date at the movies and then grab a bite afterward. Mike and El agreed that he would pick her up at 12:30. El was waiting outside on the porch with \$8 in her hand. Five minutes had passed by and Mike still wasn't there. She was worried that Mike wouldn't show up. She bounced her leg up and down. She grew impatient and went inside after about 15 minutes, a single tear streaming down her face. *Did he ditch me to hang out with his friends?* she wondered. It was unlike him to do such a thing, but she didn't know what to think. After an hour of waiting, Mike finally showed up. He was expecting El to be waiting on the porch for him, but he set his bike down and knocked on the door anyway. There was no answer. He knocked again. Still nothing. Mike and Lucas recently got El and Max their own supercomms. It occurred to him that he could just check in on her with his, so he pulled it out of his backpack and began speaking:

"El, it's Mike. Do you copy? Over."

white noise

"El, I know you're there. I can see that the lights are on. Over."

picks up

"Go away, Mike. I don't want to see you. Over."

"El...What's wrong? Why not? Over."

"You're over an hour late! Why would you do that to me? Over."

"No, I'm not! It's 12:30 right now...Over."

"No, it's not. My watch says 1:30...Over."

"Oh my god...I forgot to remind you to change your watch...shit! Over."

"What do you mean? Over."

"El, this is ridiculous. Just come out here and I'll explain everything. Over."

"Fine... *sighs* Over."

opens door and walks out

"Okay, so today's what you call Daylight Saving Time. It happens every year on the second Sunday in March at 2:00 AM and on the first Sunday in November at the same time. *pauses* So, basically you're supposed to set your clock an hour earlier on that day and if it were the Daylight Saving Time in November, you would set your clock back an hour. We use a saying to help us remember which direction it changes during each Daylight Saving Time date of the year. Since March is in the spring and November's in the fall, we say that the time springs forward in March and falls back in November. *pauses* I know. It's really complicated, isn't it? It was hard for me to grasp at first too. The point is that I'm so sorry that you had to wait for me so long."

"It's okay, Mike. I'm sorry that I got mad at you. Can we start over?"

"Don't worry about it! Of course we can."

She smiled at him and held his hand. He took her hand and kissed it.

"We better get going or we're *actually* going to be late!"

laughs

"Okay, lemme just grab my money real quick."

The wad of bills slowly floated in the air towards her, until she caught it in the palm of her hand. She booped Mike's nose and said:

"Let's go!"

They hopped on the bike and headed for the movie theater. They quickly bought their tickets and snuck into the movie during the previews. They plopped down in the seats next to Lucas and Max. Mike whispered to Lucas:

"Hey. Sorry we're late..."

"The movie's about to start, where have you guys been?"

"I forgot to remind El about Daylight Saving Time."

"Nice going, Mike."

rolls eyes

Though none of their parents would've approved, they all went to see The Breakfast Club. Mike would look at El every now and then, to make sure that she was having a good time, and sometimes she would catch him in a glance and smile. During the movie, Lucas whispered to Max:

"Do you want me to get you anything? Popcorn? Pop?"

"Nah, I'm good, but thanks."

pauses

Lucas suddenly brings it back up after two minutes.

"Please let me get you something...I feel bad."

"Okay fine, stalker! Pop's good."

"I'm on it! *pauses* Be right back!"

Mike turned to El and whispered:

"Have you ever tried popcorn before?"

"No."

"What about corn? Have you ever had corn before?"

"Yes."

"You'd probably like it then. It's this snack that comes from corn kernels. You want me to get you some?"

"Sure."

"Okay, I'll be right back!"

Lucas and Mike talked as they waited in line for food and drinks.

"Man, I was so nervous in there...I just don't know how you do it!"

"Do what?"

"It just comes so easy to you. You just always know what to say and when it's the right moment to make a move when you're with El.
pauses I just feel like I need to impress Max all the time."

"You just have to feel your way into it. Pay attention to her body language. You don't have to perform some grand gesture or anything. She likes you, Lucas. Just quit being a pussy!"

"You're right...I don't know what I was afraid of!"

When it was his turn to order, he asked for a large soda. He paid for it and stuck two straws in it for them both to share.

"Is this good?"

"Oh yeah, she's gonna love that."

"Thanks. See you in there."

Lucas made his way back to the movie and sat back down next to Max.

"*whispers* What did I miss?"

"Hey! *rubs arm* Not much. Principal Vernon just assigned them a thousand-word essay where they have to describe who they think they are."

"Ha, sounds like Mr. Myers' assignments!"

"Haha, right?!"

Lucas put his arm around Max and handed her the drink. Her

eyebrows danced as they both took a sip.

"This is so sweet, Lucas! Thanks."

Mike was next in line at the concession stand. He ordered a large popcorn, paid for it, and headed back to the movie. He sat back down and placed the bag of popcorn in between them.

"*whispers* Hey! What'd I miss?"

"Principal Vernon is making them write a thousand-word essay where they have to describe who they think they are."

"Yikes!"

giggles

Mike reached into the bag and grabbed a couple of pieces of popcorn in one hand, asking:

"You wanna try some now?"

"Sure," she said.

He then turned to face her and took each individual kernel out of his left hand, feeding her one piece at a time.

"*whispers* What do you think?"

"It's really good!"

As he did this, he continued to get closer until he ran out and pretended to take a piece out of his hand, just so that he could grab her chin and pull her in for a kiss instead. She smiled at the gesture.

She then reached into the bag herself and popped a handful of popcorn into her mouth, Mike laughing as she stuffed her face with more of it. She leaned her head against his shoulder. He moved his arm underneath hers, their palms meeting as their fingertips lined up, slid past each other, and interlocked. Normally, the thought of holding a girl's hand on a date would make Mike nervous, but for some reason, it just came naturally to him when he was with El.

Perhaps it was her calming spirit and aura, or maybe it was the fact that he had already kissed her, so it almost felt like second nature to him at this point. If anything, he had skipped that step if you consider the fact that they held hands while running away from the bad men, when dancing at the Snow Ball, and on several other occasions. Holding her hand, hugging her, kissing her—Whatever it was, it all just felt right. There was something about El that just made Mike want to be near her every chance he got. She was just so sweet and someone who he felt very comfortable around. More importantly, she felt the same way and neither of them had any reason to be nervous because this was new to both of them and they were both in it together, 100%.

El looked confused during different parts of the movie, so Mike whispered:

"I'll explain this to you later, I promise."

They stopped by McDonald's after the movie. Max and El were standing in line when El saw a picture of a burger and fries. She started to have a flashback of eating at Benny's and of the bad men chasing her and killing him. It was El's turn next, but she was so lost in thought that she didn't even hear nor notice that the cashier was trying to get her attention.

"Sweetie, I'm gonna need you to order something..."

Max nudged El and looked at her, but when she didn't respond, she asked the lady to give them a moment. She told Lucas to get Mike, who was washing his hands in the restroom. She turned to El and lightly shook her by the shoulders.

"El? Are you okay?"

She snapped out of it and said:

"Sorry...I-I had a bad memory."

"It's ok, El. *pauses* Mike's here now, what do you want me to order for you?"

"Um...A cheeseburger, fries, and a Sprite."

"You got it!"

"Thanks."

Mike pulled her aside and asked her what was wrong. She explained what happened and he comforted her. She hugged him and they sat down with Lucas and Max in a booth.

"Are we all good now?"

"Yes. Thanks, Lucas."

"No problem."

She told them about her experience at Benny's. Max was fascinated and impressed by the stories she told them. When they finished eating, Mike and El rode back home on Mike's bike. They walked up to the porch and sat in the rocking chairs.

"That was fun."

"Yeah! *pauses* Hey, El?"

"Yes?"

"Can I tell you a secret?"

"Sure."

She got up out of her chair, walked over to Mike, and sat in his lap. He stroked her hair, placed it behind her ear, and whispered:

"I really like having you around."

She faced him and smiled. She rested her head against his, their noses touching, and whispered:

"Me too."

Both of their lips met at once. Without realizing it, she lifted them up as they were making out. They both freaked out for a second, but then Mike turned to her and said:

"Seems like love is in the air!"

laughs

12. Every Breath You Quake

On March 14th, El woke up to the smell of eggos, fresh out of the toaster. She got up out of bed and followed the smell to the kitchen. Hopper was fixing her breakfast.

"Good morning!"

"*gasps* Geez! *pauses* You scared me!"

"*laughs* Sorry, Dad."

"*chuckles* That's okay. Good morning, kid."

She set their plates and cups on the table. They both sat down and talked.

"Did you sleep ok? I heard you yelling something last night."

"I was having a dream about war."

"Oh. Have you been watching too many war movies?"

"No...You know, I was in a war, kid. The Vietnam War."

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"What was it like?"

"Well, it was really scary, kid. I think about it all the time. *clears throat* There was a lot of loss, but none of it compared to losing Sara."

He shed a tear and El wiped it away. She put her hand on top of his.

"Well, you've got me now and I'm not going anywhere."

He held her hand and they continued to talk until it was time for him to go to work. Before leaving, Hopper turned to El and said:

"Oh, hey, kid! I almost forgot to tell you that your Aunt Becky called last night."

"Really? What did she call about?"

"I'm not sure, I was half asleep when she called, but I told her that you would call her back in the morning."

"Okay, thanks, Dad."

"Alright, kid. I'll see you later."

"Bye."

El had called her Aunt Becky almost every day since she returned home, to keep in touch and check in on Mama. She was scared that something was wrong with Mama, so she picked up the sticky note with her phone number on it and called her back.

"Hello?"

"Hey, Aunt Becky, it's Jane."

"Hey, Jane. How are you?"

"I'm good. I heard that you called last night."

"I did. *pauses* I was calling because... *sighs* Well, there's no easy way to say this, but your mom's not doing well."

"What's wrong with her?"

"I can't get her to eat or drink anything."

cries

"*sniffles* I-I need to see her..."

"If Jim's ok with it, then it's fine by me."

"I'll ask him."

"Ok. Take care, sweetie!"

hangs up

She got together a duffle bag of her clothes and toiletries. She grabbed some cash and left a note for Hopper. She hitchhiked her way up to Chicago until she could get on a bus. She sat in the very back, so she could check in on her mama without worrying about whether people would interrupt her or not. When she finally made it to Aunt Becky's house, she opened the door with her mind and yelled:

"AUNT BECKY? IT'S JANE. I'M HERE."

She ran over and said:

"Wow, that was fast! Welcome home, Jane."

"Thanks. *pauses* I checked in on her and I think I know how to help her."

"Okay. By all means, go ahead!"

El concentrated and focused her energy on her mother. She returned to the dark space, where she confronted her mother once again.

"Mama?"

no answer

"Mama?"

no answer

"Mama, i-it's Jane. I'm here to help you."

She knelt before her and grabbed her hand.

"I need you to eat your food and drink something. Can you do that for me?"

She wasn't getting any sort of confirmation from her mother, so she decided to turn to the only other person who she knew could help: Eight.

El remembered Kali telling her that she could make anyone see or **not**

see whatever she wanted. She figured that Kali could focus her energy onto Mama long enough to prevent her from recalling her trauma so intensely. She started focusing her energy on Kali. When she was face-to-face with her, she told her that she was back in Chicago and that Mama needed their help. Kali headed over to the house and knocked on the door. El opened it forcefully and pulled her in for a hug.

"I missed you."

"I missed you too, Jane. *strokes hair* Your hair's gotten longer! It looks good."

"Thanks. *pauses* You look good too."

smiles

El grabbed Kali by the hand. They both walked toward Becky. El let go of her hand to introduce her.

"Aunt Becky, this is Kali."

"The girl from the picture, right...Nice to meet you, Kali."

"Likewise."

Becky invited them into the kitchen and got them both something to drink. She got to know Kali a little at first and then started to fill her in on her sister's condition. Meanwhile, back in Hawkins, Hopper got off of work and was making his way home. When there was no answer to his secret knock, he grew more and more concerned.

"Open up, kid."

no answer

"C'mon, kid. Open up!"

When there was still no answer, he lifted up the doormat and picked up the key. He opened the door and searched around the house, calling for her. As he was hanging his hat on the coat rack, he noticed a handwritten note that El had left on the coffee table for him. He sat

down and read it. It said:

Dear Dad,

I'm sorry if I scared you, but don't worry. I am fine. I called Aunt Becky back. Mama hasn't been doing well. She hasn't eaten or had anything to drink for 4 days. She's getting thinner and weaker. I just had to see her...I hope you understand. I'm sorry. I will be back soon, I promise.

Love,

El

Without another thought, he grabbed his hat and headed for Chicago. As he made his way, El was visiting her mother, while Kali was focusing her energy on her mother's thoughts. El started to notice that her mother was growing more and more lucid as Kali worked her magic.

"Mama?"

"*mumbles* Breathe. Sunflower. Three to the right, four to the left. Rai-Jane?"

"Mama, it's Jane. I'm here!"

"Jane! Is that really you?"

"Yes, it's really me. *smiles* How do you feel?"

"I-I feel lighter! I can finally hear myself think."

She ran over and hugged her mother for the first time. She climbed into her lap and fed her. She gave her an eggo to nibble on and had her wash it down with a glass of milk. Unfortunately, Kali lost all control over her mother's thoughts. The bad memories slowly started to creep back into her mind. El could sense this, having lived through her own bad memories every day.

"What's happening to me? I feel different..."

"Mama? What's wrong?"

"Listen, Jane, I love y-"

All of a sudden, her face returned to its normal, empty expression. She went back to repeating the 12 words that owned her:

"Breathe. Sunflower. Three to the right, four to the left. Rainbow. 450."

She sobbed as she watched her mother return to her dehumanized self. She yanked her blindfold off.

"*murmurs* Breathe. Sunflower. Three to the- *gasps*"

Her eyes burst open. She woke up in tears, panting, confused about where she was. All she recognized was the feeling of Mike's arms wrapped around her and she soon realized she was in his room and on his bed.

"El, are you okay? What's wrong?"

"I-I don't know...What happened?"

"I don't know either...We both fell asleep and you kept on mumbling these words before you woke up: 'Breathe. Sunflower. Three to the right, four to the left. Rainbow. 450.' *pauses* Does that mean anything to you?"

"Y-yes..."

She got chills just thinking about it. She teared up, her lip starting to quiver.

"Hey...Sh, sh, it's okay."

He pulled her close, her head buried into his chest, and stroked her hair. They stayed like that for what felt like hours.

13. Never Let MEggo

March 17, 1985, St. Patrick's Day:

One afternoon, El and Hopper went on a walk together in the forest, when all of sudden they came across a stray dog. It was a golden retriever puppy, only a couple months old, but still had a collar. Hopper bent down to look at it and carefully approached the dog.

"Hey, little guy. What's your name?"

He checked the collar and saw that its name was Lucky.

"Lucky, huh? You don't seem so lucky to me. *turns to El* I think that this is the dog that went missing the other day."

The dog started whimpering. El sensed that it was in pain. She would know that look anywhere, that look of despair. She could tell just by the sad gleam in its eyes that it had been abused by its owner. She had once experienced that same kind of torment, that same feeling of being alone and abused, with no one and nowhere to turn to. It was then that Mike had saved her, and now she would do the same for Lucky.

"Dad?"

"Yeah, kid?"

"Can we keep her?"

"No, I don't think so, kid."

"*batts eyes* Please! Pretty please with a cherry on top!"

"No!"

"Why not?"

"Because she has an owner who is looking for her and besides, taking care of a dog is a responsibility. You have to train it so that it won't piss or shit in the house, you have to feed it, give it bathes...It's a lot

of work! It's like taking caring of a baby."

"But I am responsible and Will had one, why can't I?"

"Because I said no."

"But-"

"But nothing. My answer is final."

"This is so unfair!"

"I'm sorry, kid. That's just the way it is. Right now, our priority is making sure that this dog's okay. *pauses* Lemme see your belt."

She took off and handed him her belt, as he did the same with his own.

"We have to work fast so that this dog doesn't run away from us. *pauses* Actually, could you hold it still with your powers?"

nods

She held Lucky there, while he fastened the belts together by their buckles, making a leash. Then, he attached the leash to the collar and fastened the buckle in place as El let go.

"Alright. Now, let's go home."

El sulked the whole walk home while Hopper was talking with Callahan and Powell over his walkie-talkie. They all met up at the cabin shortly after and his partners brought a veterinarian to examine the dog. She concluded that it did not have rabies or any other diseases, but needed around-the-clock care and supervision. Hopper went back to the station and left El in charge of the dog. El took good care of Lucky: She bathed her, filled a bowl of water for her, and even fed her eggos, which she seemed to love as much as El did. After the puppy devoured the eggo, she picked her up, examined her, and then said:

"He told me not to get attached to you, but I don't care..."

El lied on her stomach, her face resting in her hands.

"Now, what should I call you? Hmm...*rubs chin with index finger and thumb*"

She looked over at the empty eggo box, then back at the dog. She slowly rose up to her knees and lifted her finger in the air, as if she had just come up with the best idea in the world. Then she said:

"Eggo! *picks up dog, brings it close* I'm gonna call you Eggo."

Forgetting that she couldn't keep it, she decided to call Mike and tell him about her new dog. She set Eggo next to her on the couch as she picked up the phone, ready to dial Mike's number. She picked it up and listened to the dial tone, remembering when she had first heard and hummed along with it at Mike's house, 2 years back. She smiled to herself and dialed away. After a couple of rings, he finally picked up.

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's me."

"Hey! I've missed you."

"I've missed you too."

"Have you had a good week so far?"

"Yes, a great one! Wanna know why?"

"Why?"

"I'm getting a dog!"

"Really? That's great! What're you gonna name it?"

"Eggo."

"*laughs* HAHAAHAHA, I love it! That's so you!"

"Thanks. *giggles* Hehe."

"I can't believe that Hopper's actually letting you get a dog!"

"Yea-W-Well, not exactly...*pauses* We found a dog in the woods, but he won't let me keep it."

"Aww, I'm sorry, El. Well, it's probably for the best...It could have rabies or something."

"See, that's the thing though...A ve-veteri-"

"Veterinarian?"

"Yeah, a veterinarian looked at her...No rabies or any other diseases."

"Oh. *pauses* Then what's the problem? Why isn't he letting you keep the dog?"

"Well, it had a dog collar on when we found it, so it actually already has an owner."

"Oh, well, that makes sense. Still sucks though..."

"Yeah...But Mike, I can tell that its owners treated it badly."

"What makes you think that?"

"I can't explain it really, I just know...*pauses* Well, do you remember when you first found me?"

"Like it was yesterday."

"Well, it was just like that. It looked at me and I could feel the fear projecting through its eyes."

"You really think that its owners were abusive?"

"I don't think...I know."

"Well, I guess he'll find out when he returns it to the owners...*pauses* Or...you could take Eggo's collar and use it to find the family with your mind."

"You're a genius!"

"I'm just telling you what you already know, but glad I can help!"

"How fast can you get here?"

"Faster than you can say Eggo...don't actually say it though."

"*giggles* I won't, I promise."

"Be there soon!"

"Alright."

She paused, about to hang up the phone, but then blurted out:

"I love you, Mike."

"I love you too."

smiles and hangs up

He and Nancy hopped in the car and headed towards El's house. Meanwhile, El watched some television with Eggo to pass the time. About 20 minutes later, Mike arrived. He knocked his special knock on the door, so she cut off the tv and let him in. El had Nancy hold Eggo for a minute while she and Mike greeted each other. Once her hands were free, she reached over and pinched him.

"OW! What was that for?!"

El and Nancy laugh

"You're not wearing any green!"

"Oh, right...Very funny!"

picks up Eggo

"So this is Eggo, huh?"

"Yeah, isn't she cute?"

"*speaks in baby voice* The cutest."

crosses arms and frowns

"...After you of course!"

"Nice save, Mike! *pauses* Well, I'm gonna get going, unless you guys need something..." said Nancy.

"Actually, can you just keep holding Eggo for a minute. I need to get the blindfold. Get the tv ready for me, Mike, will you?"

"Sure."

"Whatever you two do in your own time!"

laughs

She ran to her bedroom and grabbed the blindfold. When she returned, Mike cut on the tv. Then, she handed him the blindfold and he said:

"Turn around."

turns around

Mike covered her eyes with the blindfold, kissing her neck as he finished tying it. They interlocked fingers and he guided her to the couch with his hand. Then, he let go of her hand and plopped down next to her. Nancy handed her Eggo and said bye to them. Blood started streaming from El's nose as she started fiddling with Eggo's collar. Then, she woke up in the black emptiness. In the distance, she saw a family. She watched as the father ignored his daughter, after showing him her impressive report card. The little girl huffed and walked over to show her mother. She tried to appeal to her, but the mother couldn't get over the fact that she had an A minus in math. The little girl tried to explain how hard she worked and apologized. She swore that she would do better, but her mother wasn't buying it.

"*sarcastic tone* Oh, you poor child...You want some cheese with that whine? No supper for you tonight."

scowls and storms off

"*grabs wrist* HEY! Where do you think you're going?! Don't you walk away from me!"

"Whatever."

"That's it!"

She was mortified, and so was El. *Is this what all mothers are like?* she wondered. The little girl's mom reached for the paddle hanging on the wall and spanked her. El gasped at the sight. Without thinking, she grabbed Mike's hand and squeezed it tight. In the distance, she heard a baby bawling. She rushed over to it. Both parents just ignored the restless baby. No one was stopping it from crying and El couldn't help but cry along with it. When the baby's older brother finally stopped its crying, El ripped off her blindfold and cried into Mike's chest. He stroked her hair and told her that everything was gonna be okay. Then, he kissed her tenderly, to distract her from the disturbing images playing through her mind. Once she calmed down, he talked to her about it:

"So, what exactly happened? What was the family like?"

"They were...horrible. They treated their children like garbage...I've never seen anything like it."

"I'm so sorry, El...*sniffles* This was a bad idea...It's all my fault."

"No, no. I'm glad I know. Now, we can stop my dad from giving Eggo back to that family."

"You're right. *pauses* Well, why don't you go fix your makeup and I'll feed Eggo."

"Okay, thanks."

Once she left the room, Mike called Hopper at work.

"Hey, kid. What's up?"

"What were you thinking?!"

"That's not my daughter...Who the hell is this?"

"Mike Wheeler."

"What makes you think that you can talk to me that way, young man? I am an ADULT, for God's sakes! I doubt that you talk to your own father like that."

"El deserves to have a dog, sir. She needs this."

"I understand that Mike, but this dog belongs to someone else."

"Yeah, a really toxic family! *pauses* El visited them, she saw it with her own eyes."

"She did? *sighs* Well, I'll look into it. You just stay there and keep her company, ok?"

"Will do."

"Alright. Bye, kid."

He smiled because he knew it was a good sign when he called him 'kid'. It meant that he too was a part of the family.

After he hung up, he made El some tea. When she came back from the bathroom, they played tug-of-war with the puppy. About an hour later, Hopper returned.

"El?"

walks out

"Dad?"

"I'm sorry. I should've been more considerate earlier...It's just that I-"

"It's okay, Dad. I understand...She needs a proper home.*sniffles*"

"Yeah, I think so too...Here."

"Wait? Does that mean-You mean, we can keep her?!"

"Sure, kid. We can keep her."

"*squeals and jumps into arms* Oh, thank you, thank you, thank you!"

"*chuckles* Don't thank me, thank him. *points to Mike* He's the one who convinced me."

She turned to him with a look of sincerity and said:

"You did this, for me?"

nods

She pulled him into a lingering hug.

"But Dad, how is this possible?"

"Well, after Mike called, I looked more into this family and found evidence of domestic and animal abuse, so I threw their asses in jail, well, just the parents of course, not the kids."

"What about the kids though? Where will they go?"

"Social Services is handling it as we speak, but we did a background check to make sure that they weren't secretly bad men, so the kids are in good hands."

"Oh, that's great!"

"Yeah. Well, tell you what...I have some paperwork to take care of, so why don't you two take Eggo for a quick walk and then meet me back here for dinner at 7:00?"

"Thanks, Dad! You're the best!"

"Just doing my job, kid."

She and Mike walked out the door and attached the leash to Eggo. Mike started out by holding it until Eggo calmed down. Then, he handed it to El. They walked through the woods and stopped every once and a while to throw a stick or two for Eggo. As Eggo ran to get it, El accidentally stepped into a ditch and collapsed onto the ground. Mike grabbed her hand, opposite to him, and pulled her up. With a

look of concern on his face, he asked:

"You okay?"

"My ankle hurts a little, but I'm fine. Thanks."

"*turns around, points to back* Here, jump onto my back. I'll carry you home."

"No, Mike, really, you don't have to do that."

"I insist!"

She reluctantly climbed onto his back and wrapped her arms around him, letting her palms dangle in front of his neck. Half way through the walk back, she said:

"Wait, Mike. Stop!"

He stopped walking and she slid down from his back. Not putting any weight on her ankle, she hopped in front of him and said:

"Mike, you're out of breath. Just let me walk the rest of the way home."

"El, you're limping. Just let me carry you, please!"

"Okay, fine."

They finally made it to the house, after several more minutes of huffing and puffing along the trail. He set her down on the step and then reclined himself, with one hand flat on the porch, and the other holding Eggo. Both exhausted, they panted and then looked at each other. He lifted his hand to put on her cheek, then leaned in to kiss her. As their lips were about to meet, another tongue slipped in and licked them. They broke into laughter. Then, Mike looked at the dog and said:

"Hey, she's mine!"

El laughs hysterically

They then walked inside and ate dinner with Hopper. How pawfect!

14. Ball's in Her Court

Hey, guys! Just so you know, I based the part with El and Max on this photo leaked from season 3 that I saw of Max with a yellow raincoat with red lining on the inside and El with a red raincoat. In the photo, they were standing by a bike that Max was holding. Wonder what the actual scene is about!

It was a rainy day in late March, and the gang all met up at school several minutes before class, like usual.

"*yawns and pats mouth* Good morning, guys," said Mike.

"Someone's tired!" said Will.

"Yeah, well I was up late talking to El on the phone..."

Dustin put his arm around Mike and said:

"Look at this stud! I'm so proud. *tousles hair*"

"*laughs and fixes hair* Well, I don't know about that, but thanks, guys."

"Speaking of girls, where's Max?" said Lucas.

"I don't know, shouldn't you know that?" said Dustin.

"Maybe she's skipping..."

"You always assume the worst in her, Mike. Try to lighten up a little, will you?"

"I'm not assuming the worst in her, I'm just saying that she's skipped a couple of times, that's all."

"Yeah, right. *rolls eyes*"

Both boys dropped the matter and made their way to class. Lucas got worried when Max didn't show up for first period. As Mike had predicted, she was indeed skipping. She left a note in Lucas' locker

before the boys arrived at school, which fell out when he opened it before second period. He picked it up and looked it over. It read:

Dear Lucas,

I thought that I'd cut class today and go visit El instead. I still haven't seen her new dog yet, plus she wanted me to give her skateboarding lessons at some point. Tell the boys I said hi. Catch you later!

Love,

Max

Lucas closed his locker and walked over to Mike before he headed to 2nd. He handed him the note and said:

"Looks like you were right about Max..."

"She's going to El's? That's weird."

"Yeah...*sighs* She just wants to keep her company, I guess."

Lucas then leaned against the locker, holding his backpack straps. He sighed and said:

"She said 'Love, Max' in the note. Should I be worried? We've never said that to each other before..."

"Well, I mean, it's not like she's gonna put 'Sincerely!'"

"I guess you're right."

They went on to class. Meanwhile, Max arrived at El's house. She knocked her special knock on the door and El opened it for her.

"Hi, Max."

"Hey, El."

"Come on in."

steps in

"So, where's Eggo?"

"*picks up Eggo* Right here. Say hi, Eggo."

barks

"Aww, she's so cute!"

"Thanks."

They played with the dog and ate some snacks. Then, Max turned to El and said:

"Wanna get started?"

"Sure."

"Okay. Let's go then!"

both hop on bike

rides away

Max turned to El and asked:

"Hey, El?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you think you could make this bike fly, for just a little bit I mean?"

"Yes."

"You sure?"

"Positive."

"Alright. Blow me away!"

El centered her thoughts and concentrated on all of the pain and trauma that drove her. Memories flashed through her mind. First, being taken away from Mama. She recited the words that her mother

was constantly repeating out loud. Then, she thought of those she had killed, hurt, or who had died because of her. She thought about those that she missed, Kali and Aunt Becky. She thought about the Upside Down, demogorgons, and being separated from Mike. She thought about how pissed she was at Hopper for keeping her away from him for so long, and lastly, she remembered the main source of her trauma: Papa. The bike slowly but surely lifted off the ground as she was deep in thought, and off they went! They flew, in a secluded area of course so no one could see, but it was even more spectacular than Max had imagined!

Once finished flying, Max said:

"That was...unbelievable! Who knew that you were such a boss!"

wipes nose

"That felt good. I needed that!"

"HAHA! That's one way to get your anger out!"

laughs

They got off of the bike and walked over to the smaller ramp at the skate park. Max set the board down and said:

"So, just get on it with your right foot in the front and your left foot behind. You can use me for balance if you need to."

"Okay. *hops on, slips* WHOA!"

grabs shoulders

"Hahaha, it's okay. It's always tricky the first time."

El flashed her a smile and waited for further instruction.

"So, now you just wanna kinda dip your left foot every once in a while and push off of it, then bring it back to the board."

"Okay. Here goes nothing!"

skates

"*valley girl accent* Totally tubular!"

laughs

runs over

"That was great, El. Now, let me teach you a couple of flips and tricks."

"Okay."

Max demonstrated a couple of tricks and then let El give it a try.

"Like this?"

flips

"Exactly! Wow, you're a natural!"

"Thanks!"

pauses

"Max?"

"Yeah?"

Trying to test out the new social skills and manners that she had learned, she asked:

"How are things going with you and Lucas?"

"Great actually."

"That's good..."

pauses

"Max?"

"Yes, El?"

"Can you teach me more about boys?"

"Sure, what do you want to know?"

"I don't know...Why do they always want to play basketball?"

"*laughs* Boys are competitive...They like having to fight for what they want. Not all boys like basketball or sports though. The boys aren't even that athletic, but Steve got them into it because he made it look *makes air quotes* cool or whatever."

"So typical! *roll eyes"

laughs

All of a sudden, an older boy wearing a beanie came up behind Max and groped her. El lowered her head and gave him an intense stare. Then she snapped her head to the side and twisted his arm. As blood dripped from her nose, she said:

"Why don't you try that again? I dare you..."

She lowered her head once more. A streak of pee leaked through his skinny jeans. Then, she lifted her chin up and rubbed her nose. Using some of the colorful vocabulary she picked up from Dustin, she confidently said:

"Didn't think so. Now fuck off!"

flips off

She provoked fear in him that compared to nothing else and he ran off. Max turned to El, her mouth wide open, and said:

"Holy shit, El! You made him cry."

"I did?"

tears up

"Yeah! Aww, El, don't worry about him. He deserved it!"

hugs

"Thank you. Skater boys are disgusting creatures...You really know how to put them in their place! I'm proud of you." said Max.

"You are?"

"Hell yeah! That was really impressive...Wait, 'til Mike hears about this!"

smiles

"I have an idea. How 'bout I teach you how to play basketball, so that the next time the boys play a game, you can show off your new skills? I bet Mike would be impressed. So, what do ya say?"

"Yes!"

"Rad! Now, El, before I teach you anything else, you promise you won't use your powers?"

"Promise."

"Good."

El marched over to the basketball court as Max went and got the basketball out of the basket on her bike. She ran to the court and came dribbling toward El.

"This is called 'dribbling.' It's what you do before you throw the ball in the hoop. You can't ever run without dribbling the ball because that's called 'traveling'. Understand?"

"I think so."

El's eyes followed the ball as it bounced up and down. After demonstrating how to dribble, Max passed the ball to El. She just barely caught it, not expecting that Max would throw it to her. She attempted to dribble across the court. Then, she asked:

"How was that?"

"That was good. Now, I just need to show you how to shoot hoops and play defense."

"Okay."

Max made a couple of baskets and then let El give it a shot. When she made it in on her first try, both of the girls celebrated by high-fiving. Then, Max and El took turns playing defense and offense, to give El enough practice.

"Thanks for everything, Max. This was fun!"

"Anytime."

The next day, the boys started to play a game of basketball after school. Max left to pick up El. As El was about to join the game, Mike pulled her aside and said:

"El, are you sure you're ready? You know, it's not as easy as it looks."

"Says the boy who already made 7 shots. *rolls eyes* Yes, I'm sure."

"Well, that's just because I'm the tallest one in the group...Wait, you've been keeping count?"

"I don't know...I mean, yeah. Yeah, I guess I have."

"*smiles and blushes* Anyway, either way, we'll take it easy on you since it's your first time and everything."

"Don't bother. Quit babying me, Mike!" she said aggravatingly, as she stormed off.

"Okay, okay. Fine."

Despite El's wishes, Mike asked the boys to anyway.

"Guys, let's go easy on her, okay? It's her first time, and I don't want her to be upset if she loses."

"Okay, copy that." said Dustin.

Earlier, the two teams had been Mike & Will and Dustin & Lucas, but after adding in Max & El, Will switched to their team and Dustin & Lucas joined Mike's team. El, the charming mage, was able to steal

the ball away from the boys several times during the game. Lucas called a time-out after a while and said:

"Look, guys, this isn't working. She's clearly a lot better at this than we are. She keeps stealing the ball away...I hate to say it, but do you think it's possible that she's using her powers?"

"Of course not! El wouldn't do that. You should know better, Lucas..."

"Well, I mean, she's done it before, why wouldn't she do it again?"

"Because *she* knows better than that...Also, that was two years ago! Didn't you still use a nightlight then?"

"WHO TOLD YOU?"

eyes Dustin

"*grunts* Really, Dustin?!"

"*shrugs* Whoops..." he said hesitantly.

"*rolls eyes* Anyway, what's your point, Mike?"

"My point is that you used to use a nightlight two years ago, that was a habit of yours, and El used to use her powers to manipulate things without telling us. A lot can change in two years, so who's to say that she hasn't either?"

"Whatever. Still, something still smells fishy..." said Lucas.

"Maybe that's just your B.O.!" said Dustin.

"OH, YOU'RE GONNA GET IT NOW! C'MERE, YOU LITTLE BASTARD!"

puts Dustin in headlock

"GUYS, GUYS! Let's keep our head in the game and out of our asses. We're losing, remember?!" said Mike.

"You're right...It's on!" said Dustin.

They broke the huddle and returned to the center of the court. They continued playing until Dustin and Lucas gave up because they were too sore and tired to keep going. Max offered to give both Lucas and El a ride home.

"El, do you need a ride home or are you going to stay here with Mike for a while?"

"I'm good here, thanks."

"Okay. See you soon!"

Lucas left with Max, and Joyce picked up Will and Dustin as well. Suddenly, there was no one left, but Mike and El. They were still so engaged in the game that they decided to keep playing. Now, the two most competitive members of the party were head-to-head, heart-to-heart.

As El tried to steal the ball away from Mike, he lifted it above her head, to the point where she couldn't reach it without using her powers. He moved the ball from side-to-side, up & down, and around his back, in hopes of distracting her, but she was quick as a cat. He found it difficult to stay in place while moving the ball around and ended up accidentally traveling with it. Noticing this, she tackled him and collapsed onto his chest, trying to snatch the ball out of his hands. They fiddled with the ball until Mike was finally able to break free from El's grip, letting go of the ball in the process. The ball lightly bounced away in the distance, but El's delayed reaction caused her to pin him down after the ball was already out of his hands. They watched as the ball finally came to a stop, both still panting from all of the wrestling. Neither of them noticed that El had pinned him down until their eyes met once again. They both froze.

Mike looked her up and down and gulped, still trying to catch his breath. Their focus was now not on the ball, but on each other. Too lost in his eyes to climb off, she stayed there, straddling him, and stared deeper into his eyes. He too got lost in her rich, brown eyes as she gazed at him. Her eyes traveled rapidly, stopping every now and then to look at his lips. He studied her face, starting with her eyes and moving down to her nose, which he wasn't used to seeing without a streak of blood trailing from her nostril. Then, he finally

directed his attention to her lips. Their faces were close, their hearts racing, their adrenaline running off the charts. Suddenly, an unknown force took over El and made her want to kiss Mike with every fiber of her being. He exhaled and in the heat of the moment, El grabbed his hair, pulling his face toward hers, and planted a kiss onto his lips. Who knew that El could be so competitive, so bold, and so sexy!

There was something about this kiss that was wilder than any other time. When they broke the kiss, the hand grasping Mike's hair returned to the ground and she interlaced her fingers with his as he kept going. In between kisses, she would smile at him and he would notice the way that her hair fell in front of her face. He would then think to himself, *God, she's stunning*, each time that he leaned in for another.

His hands traveled all around her back and waist, hers around his shoulders and neck. Once his hands met the small of her back, they both sat up. Every moment they shared together felt like an eternity of bliss.

Once standing, he adjusted her higher onto his hips with a bounce. They shared one, last, lingering kiss before letting go. When they pulled away, she leaned her forehead against his as she hopped down, her hands sliding from his shoulders to his chest, then finally letting go.

"Wow, that was gooo-"

"So...who won?" she asked

"Who won?! *laughs* After *that* kiss, I'm pretty sure you won!"

"Well, I don't see a trophy!"

"Wow. Someone's high maintenance! *rolls eyes*"

Mike sighed, reached for his pocket, and pulled out an eggo.

El smiled and tousled his hair. Then, she took the eggo and ate it, as they both hopped on Mike's bike. They rode home to his house, where they remained for the rest of the day.

15. Will's Birthday

Hey y'all. This chapter isn't really Mileven-focused, but I just wanted to include a chapter centered around Will's birthday, since we know the actual date. Anyway, enjoy this multi-ship, family/friendship chapter, and I promise that my next one will have more Mileven content.

[Midnight, March 22, 1985]

El normally went to bed later than Hopper asked of her, but this time she dozed off early, exhausted from her sleepover with Max the night before. All of a sudden, a loud noise woke her up. She could hear someone stumbling inside, talking loudly. She started to get scared and worried that there might be an intruder. She realized that it was not one, but two people. She peeped her head out of the bedroom door, to see who was causing all of the racket. She couldn't believe her eyes. It was Hopper and Joyce, stumbling and laughing.

Then, Hopper stopped and said:

"*slurs* Look, Joyce. I know it's only been 3 months since Bob died, but I lo-"

"*slurs* Hop, I know. I lo-"

"I know."

smiles

Then, she saw Hopper pick up Joyce and kiss her passionately, as they moved toward the bedroom. She stepped out of the room, wondering what exactly was going on. She opened the crack in Hopper's door, catching them in an intimate moment, both half dressed. El had seen the movies, she knew how it worked when two adults were in love, what they did. Despite that, she certainly wasn't expecting this from Hopper.

"Dad?"

Startled, his head jerked around, his eyes wide.

"Yeah? What's wrong, kid?"

"Nothing, I just heard some stumbling, that's all. Is everything okay?"

"Everything's fine."

"Okay, sorry. Well, night, Dad. Um, goodnight, Joyce."

"Night, kid," he said.

"Night, sweetie," said Joyce.

She left the room. Hopper put his hands over his face, as Joyce said:

"Busted... *sighs*"

Smashing his palm into his head repeatedly, he said:

"Shit, this is bad..."

"Well, maybe I should just go then..."

"Yeah, that's probably best...She's going to have A LOT of questions tomorrow!"

"Yeah. Well, we'll just have to keep it on the down low for a while...But wait...Oh shit!" said Joyce.

"What? What is it?"

"Today's Will's birthday and we'll both be at the party today..."

"FUCK."

"Don't worry, Hop. We'll figure something out. We always do."

nods, rubs hand with thumb

Joyce got up and started putting on her pants, but Hopper pulled her back in bed and kissed her neck.

"Hopper!"

"Sorry, I couldn't resist..."

"*smiles* Dammit! I wish I could stay, but it's so late. Will's probably wondering where the hell I am. I gotta go."

"Alright. I'll see you later, honey."

"Bye. *smiles and kisses*"

Hopper sat and contemplated in bed, without coffee, since it was not yet morning. He finally went to bed, tossing and turning the whole night. By the time morning came, El was ready to pepper him with questions, but she could barely even look at him. She was too confused and embarrassed. She pouted in her room until Hopper offered to fix her some fruit loops. They then sat at the table together, both silent.

El devoured her fruit loops in spoonfuls, trying her best to avoid the talk that she and Hopper were about to have.

"Slow down, kid...You'll get a stomach ache."

"Sorry."

When she finished, she ran to her room and shut the door before he could say anything. When the time came for Will's party, they both got in the truck and left. Afraid that he would bring it up, El talked the whole car ride, avoiding the pending conversation. She dodged his questions and changed the subject whenever he started to bring it up.

When they finally got there, she starting running inside.

"Hey! Slow down, kid."

pulls back

"I know that you don't want to talk about last night, but we will have this conversation later, young lady!"

rolls eyes and runs off

El walked in shyly.

"El!" Max exclaimed.

She looked at the boys and Max and said:

"Hey, guys. Happy Birthday, Will! *hugs*"

"*pats back* Thanks, Eleven."

Mike walked over to El with his arms out and said "Hey!" with a big smile on his face. He gave her a quick hug and then said:

"How are you?"

"I'm fine, you?"

"I'm good...You excited?! This is your first birthday party."

"Yeah, I guess so..."

Mike was surprised by how little energy and enthusiasm she had. She just didn't seem herself. He ignored it to see if her mood would change later on.

Meanwhile, Joyce offered to take El's coat. She walked over to the coat rack where she found Hopper taking off his hat. He placed it on her head and then pulled her in for a kiss by the rim of the hat. She laughed, her face then turning serious, as she said:

"What are you still doing here?"

"I figured I could help you set up."

"Aww, well thank you. Right now I'm getting the cake ready if you wanna help me ice and serve it."

"Sure."

Meanwhile, the boys set up a D&D game at the kitchen table. As they were playing, they noticed how much Hopper and Joyce were flirting and even pointed it out. They were onto them.

As they were playing, Hopper grabbed Joyce's cute little apron that was lying out on the counter and put it over her head. Then, he reached around her waist, to grab the laces, and tied the sash in the back. The kids found this kind of random but continued playing. Then, he stood behind her and helped her squeeze the icing bag, his hands on top of hers. The gang exchanged a couple of glances and then continued once more.

Towards the end of their campaign, Mike noticed that El was acting differently. She kept spacing out, looking in Joyce and Hopper's direction. He finally decided to talk to her about it. He moved his arm from her shoulder and placed it on her head. As he was playing with her hair, she turned to him.

"*rubs arm* Hey, are you okay?"

Though his touch calmed her, it didn't change what she was feeling.

"Not really."

"Aww, what's wrong?"

"I can't...I can't talk about it here. *eyes Hopper and Joyce"

"*puts hand on thigh* That's fine, we'll just go someplace private!"

"*pats hand* Okay. *holds hand*"

"We'll be right back, guys."

"Okay," said Will.

They walked away from the group, his arm around her, his hand rubbing the side of her shoulder.

turns to face her

"Okay. So, what's bothering you?"

"I saw something last night..."

"What'd you see?"

"Something I'll never be able to get out of my brain..."

"*chuckles* But like what was it?"

"I don't wanna say..."

"Tell me. *Pleeease!*"

"Okay, fine."

pauses

"Well, I went to sleep early last night, but then this loud noise woke me up."

"Uh huh."

"And I heard two people stumbling around, so I got up to see who they were."

"And?"

"It was my dad and Joyce!"

"Holy shit!"

"But there's more..."

"There's *more?*!"

"I accidentally walked in on them while they were...fooling around."

"You mean like-"

"Yep."

"Shit...That is literally the last situation you wanna be in."

"I know!"

"Does Will know?"

"No."

"We should tell hi-"

gasps and screeches

laughs, playfully hits Hopper

Mike was interrupted by Joyce, who Hopper had just goosed.

"Looks like we don't need to!"

El couldn't help but laugh, her face already red with embarrassment.

"They're definitely onto them, but we need to figure out a way to tell them the whole story without Hopper and Joyce overhearing. We owe that to Will."

"You're right. *pauses and rubs chin* Hmm..."

A lightbulb went off in Mike's head.

"*points finger in the air* I've got it!"

looks up at Mike

"We should play Telephone!"

"Why would we call them? They're right here."

"*laughs* No, Telephone, it's this game where someone comes up with a phrase and whispers it in someone else's ear. Each person whispers it to the next, but by the time the phrase reaches the end of the circle, it usually turns into something crazy and totally different from what the first person said originally. So, instead of saying a phrase, I'm gonna start by telling Lucas everything, and he'll pass it on to everyone else, but I'll make sure that he tells everyone not to change what they hear."

gives thumbs up

"So, since you didn't actually know what it was, just pretend like you still don't, that way you can sit out and watch because you're the one who told me about Hopper and Ms. Byers."

"But friends don't lie..."

"Don't think of it as lying, think of it as...acting. Plus, we're about to reveal the truth to them anyway, so it won't matter."

"True."

"You ready?"

"Ready."

Max and the boys were sitting there, playing Footsie, but wanting to continue playing D&D. All of a sudden, Mike said:

"Let's play Telephone!"

"Ooh, good idea! I love that game!" said Dustin.

"That's just 'cause you always purposely mess up the phrases!" said Lucas.

"Not true!"

stares at Dustin

"Okay, maybe it's a little true..."

laughs

"Wait, but what about the campaign?" said Max.

"Oh yeah!" said Dustin.

"I know, but I've got a really good phrase. Plus, it would take us all day to finish."

"Yeah, okay. Let's play!" said Will.

"I've never played before. Can I just sit out for a round and watch?" said El.

"Sure." said Mike, winking at her.

"Who's gonna start?" asked Lucas.

"I will." said Mike.

"Okay." said Lucas.

Mike leaned over to Lucas and whispered in his ear, saying:

"Okay, so look. The truth is, I'm not actually going to give you a phrase. I started this game so that we could tell you guys something that Hopper and Joyce can't hear us say. *pauses* So-

"What are you whispering over there, The Gettysburg Address?" said Dustin.

"Just hold on, I'm almost done!"

"*whispers* El caught Hopper and Joyce almost screwing last night!"

He moved his head away slowly, wondering how Lucas would react. Lucas gave him a crazy look and made gestures, asking if he actually wanted him to pass that down. Mike whispered: "Yes! Pass it on!" and flicked his hands in Max's direction. The others exchanged looks, wondering what the issue was.

"*whispers, gives hesitant look* Okay, here goes nothing..."

Lucas reached over to Max and whispered:

"Okay, Max. So, we're not actually playing Telephone. Mike just wanted to tell us something that Hopper and Joyce can't overhear."

pauses

"*blurts out* Hopper and Joyce almost screwed last night! El saw them."

"Holy sh-"

covers mouth with hand

"*whispers* I know. Just pass it on!"

"What's going on?" said Dustin.

"You'll see..." she said as she leaned to whisper in his ear.

She told him the same and he responded by saying:

"You gotta be shittin' me!"

Everybody laughed.

"Y-You're serious?"

"No, I just made it up...Yes, I'm serious! *rolls eyes* Pass it on, asshole!"

"Okay, okay, I will."

Will was speechless. Everybody looked at him, wondering how he would react. Then, Mike said:

"We're sorry for springing this on you on your birthday, but we just figured that you deserved to know and it didn't feel right to keep it from you."

"It's okay, guys, really! Would you just give me and El a minute to chat though?"

"Of course! Take as long as you need." Max said.

The others left and El walked over to Will, patted his shoulder, and threw her arms around him, in a sisterly kind of way. She let go and Will asked her if she was okay. She said:

"I'm fine with it. I just wish that they had told me first, instead of finding it out myself. I love your mom though, so I'm happy for them. *shrugs* What about you though? Are you okay?"

"Yeah, I mean, I like Hopper too, so it shouldn't be so bad. He's a lot better than Bob anyway."

"Aww, that's sweet of you to say. Besides, we might even become siblings. You never know!"

gulps

giggles nervously

Will was having a harder time with this than El, but he was still happy for his mom. They decided to drop the topic and not let it get in the way of Will's birthday. When the cake was ready, they got ready to sing. Mike whispered in El's ear:

"This is the part where we sing 'Happy Birthday'. Don't worry, it's a really easy song. Just try your best."

She looked up and down at his lips and nodded, kissing him on the cheek.

"Alright, everybody. It's that time! Ready?"

"READY!" they all responded.

"HA-APPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU, HAPPY BIRTHDAY DEAR WILL, HAPPY BIRTHDAY TO YOU!"

"Thanks, guys. This looks delicious, Mom!"

"Thanks, babe."

"Make a wish!" said Dustin.

blows out candles

"What kind of cake is it?"

"Mississippi Mud Cake."

"Mmm...It's delicious, Ms. Byers," said Dustin with a mouth full of cake.

"*giggles* Thank you. I'm glad you like it!"

Shortly, after having cake, Will started opening all of his presents. The boys got him Transformers and G.I. Joe action figures.

"Whoa! This is so cool. Thanks, guys."

Max handed him a rolled up poster with a bow on it. He looked at it puzzlingly and then smiled at her. Little did he know that it was a homemade poster, a drawing of a possessed, zombie-like Will, with the caption 'Zombie Boy.'

"It's not much really. Sorry if it's totally lame..."

"Nonsense! I bet it's gonna be totally tubular!"

He unrolled the poster and stretched it out.

"Wow, Max...This is fantastic!"

"Eh, it's nothing."

"No, really. It's great! I didn't know that you drew."

"Ooh, let's see!" said Joyce.

shows Joyce

"I doodle from time to time, but I figured I would give portraits a try."

"Well, clearly you have a talent for it. Maybe we could start a comic strip together sometime!"

"That sounds really fun! We totally should."

"Definitely! Thanks. That's gonna look so cool in my room!"

Will passed around the poster for the rest to see. When it came around to Lucas, he was in awe. He was so impressed by her gift. He was filled with nothing but love for Max. He then turned to her and whispered for the first time:

"I love you."

She pulled her head away and looked at him, making sure he was serious. No guy had ever told her that before. Her pale face suddenly turned bright red. She didn't know how to react. All she knew was that she loved him too. She giggled and responded:

"Love you too, Stalker."

Then, they shared a kiss and linked arms, her head leaning on his shoulder.

After the gifts, they continued to work on their campaign for a few hours. By dinner time, everyone started to leave. Hopper turned to Mike and said:

"Hey, kid, do you need a ride home?"

"Oh, thanks for the offer, but my mom's already on her way."

"Alrighty."

When his mom showed up, Hopper and Joyce kissed goodbye. Mike turned to El and said:

"Just hang in there, alright?"

nods

He kissed her forehead and she said:

"I love you!"

"I love you too, El."

She leaned in and kissed him, her wrists crossed around his neck, his around her waist. He waved goodbye and they both started walking in opposite directions. On the car ride home, Hopper said:

"Look, kid. I get it. You saw some things you didn't want to see. I blame myself for that, and I want you to know that I'm sorry. Sex is completely natural though. There comes a time in every adult's life when they consummate their relationship with sex."

"Eww, Dad, I know. We've already had 'the talk'..."

shrugs

"That's not what I'm mad about...I'm mad that you didn't tell me about you and Joyce! You just sprung it on me out of nowhere..."

"I get that...*grabs shoulders* Well, hey, if it makes you

uncomfortable, just say the word, kid. You come first."

"*Dad, I love Joyce.* If you really want to be with her, then I'm happy for you!"

"*playfully hits shoulder* What did I do to deserve you?"

smiles

16. Snow Way I'm Leaving You!

On Wednesday, March 27, 1985, a normal school day in Hawkins, Indiana turned into a fun snow day. Mike typically didn't like missing school because unlike most people, he actually enjoyed it. Today was different though because having a snow day as late as March was pretty rare, even for Indiana. His mom let him sleep in as late as he wanted. When he woke up, he pushed the curtains to the side and looked out the window. His back and front yard were both covered in a white blanket of snow. From that moment, he knew that school was definitely canceled. He then walked into the kitchen, yawning.

"*kisses forehead* Good morning, sweetie!"

"Morning."

"No school! That's exciting. *pauses* What are you gonna do with yourself?"

"I don't know. I was thinking about getting together with El or something."

"Oh, honey. Look outside. There are about 5 inches of snow out there!"

"Yeah, son. They pulled you out of school for a reason. The roads are icy today, not meant for riding your bike."

"El's house is too far away and the roads are dangerous out there."

"*rolls eyes* This is so unfair...What the hell am I supposed to do?"

"HEY! LANGUAGE!"

rolls eyes

"Well, you can play with your little sister out in the snow, you could read a book...There are lots of things you could do!"

scoffs

He finished eating his breakfast and then called El.

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's me."

"MIKE! I missed you so much!"

"I know, I've missed you too! I'm sorry, I've just been so busy with school and stuff..."

"Wait, today's a Wednesday. Why aren't you at school now? Are you sick?"

"No, silly goose! Why don't you check outside!"

"Okay..."

looks outside

"*presses hand on window* Snow!"

"Yeah. There's like 5 inches of it out there, so they had to cancel school."

"Oh. So, can you come over then?"

"I really want to, but my parents won't let me. They're so anal..."

sighs

"I won't let that stop me though...I need to see you!"

"I need to see you too. I can't stop thinking about you..."

"I'll be there in 30 minutes...maybe a little longer because of the roads."

"Okay. Be careful!"

"Thanks, I will. Love you, El!"

"Love you too! See you soon!"

The snow was coming down hard, and after talking to Mike, Nancy offered to go out and buy all of the groceries they needed, before the roads got too bad. Mike then asked if he could tag along and his parents agreed to it. Instead, Nancy snuck Mike off to El's and later blamed her reason for being late on her car, which she claimed broke down on her way there. When they arrived, he said:

"Thanks, Nance."

"No prob, little bro."

As he walked away, he shouted back to Nancy:

"See ya!"

"Later!" she said.

Mike's hand was so numb that he could barely even knock, but El still managed to hear it and let him in all the way from her room. He stepped through the door, looking around for her. He peeped his head in her room, to find her in the corner of her bed, reading a Nancy Drew book. She set the book down and smiled at him.

"Hey!" she said with excitement.

"Hey!"

hovers over shoulder

rubs shoulders

"Nancy Drew, huh?"

"Yeah, I really like it. Have you read any of them?"

"Oh yeah, of course. It's a classic!"

Mike climbed onto the bed and situated himself, both of them smiling at each other. He laid on his back, his arms bent, with his hands cupped behind his head. Not sure what to do next, El brought the book back to her face and continued reading.

"*stares at ceiling and sighs* I can't really stay very long today..."

Not taking her eyes off the book, she responded:

"Awww, why not?"

"My parents think I'm shopping with Nancy. Nancy's gonna buy me some time while she gets the groceries, but then she's gonna have to pick me up again."

"So, how long will we have together?"

"*eyes El* Probably an hour and a half. What do you wanna do?"

"I don't know..."

sits up

"Do you have any hot chocolate mix around here?"

"Yeah, sure, whatever..."

"El?"

She lifted her eyes from the book, lowered it from her face, and placed it in her lap. Now giving him her full attention, she responded:

"Yes?"

"Did you even hear what I said?"

"No."

"Wow, I've never had to compete this much with a book before...Must be some chapter!"

"Oh yeah...Sorry! It's just so good!"

"*laughs* It's okay. I'm glad you like it."

"Can I just finish this one chapter? I'm almost done."

"Y-Yeah. Of course!"

"Thanks. *pauses* And then we'll make hot chocolate after, I promise.
pats leg"

smiles and nods

As he waited for her to finish, he laid back down, in the same position, and rested his eyes. After a few minutes of silence and anticipation, he opened his eyes, which were now fixated on El. He just laid there, watching her, with a giddy little smile on his face. He noticed how focused she was when she read. He saw the pages flip themselves ever so often. Her capabilities never failed to mesmerize him. He watched as a streak of blood traveled from her nostril, dripping onto the page. He let go of his left hand on his head and flipped over on his side, catching the blood with his index finger before it could drip onto the page. Then, he said:

"El! *points at pages with eyes*"

"What *eyes widen in confusion*?"

"Y-You're nose is bleeding on the pages.

"Oh..."

Struggling to find something to dry it off with, Mike beat her to the punch and offered her his shirtsleeve.

"Um...Here, use this."

"You sure?"

"Yeah, hurry!"

"Okay. Okay."

wipes

"If you keep this up, you're gonna need a nose plug or something!"

laughs

She stuffed a tissue strip up her nostril and made a funny face.

laughs hysterically

She shook her head, smiling, and continuing to read. Still lying on his side he watched her as she read. He was so mesmerized by the way she carried herself when she read. Scanning her face, his eyes were now fixated on her lips, mouthing each word as she read it. Now, even more tempted to kiss her, he scooted next to her. Then, he nuzzled his face into her neck and kissed it as he wrapped his arms around her stomach and situated her into his lap. She leaned against his chest, turning and lifting her left hand up, pulling his face closer to hers. She kissed him on the cheek and then teased him with an eskimo kiss. When he pulled her toward him by her pajama collar, her stomach dropped and butterflies fluttered all the way to her chest. She broke his stare by looking down at the book. On the last page, she skimmed it over and then set the book down.

She gestured 'C'mere' with her index finger, really just pulling him toward her with her powers, as he grabbed her by the pajama collar once again. Their lips met in the middle, as Mike laid her down and hovered over her. He alternated from kissing her lips to her neck. Then, he paused and whispered in her ear:

"*whispers* El?"

"*whispers* Yes?"

Running his fingers through her hair, with a look of endearment, he said:

"I love you...SO SO much."

She looked him straight in the eyes and said:

"*shaking her head* I love you more!"

"Not possible." he said, shaking *his* head and leaning in to kiss her once again.

Her hands slid through his hair, his holding her by her back and head. They rolled over and she pressed her hands against his chest,

letting them slide behind his neck as she moved in for a kiss. She gave him lingering kisses that left them both feeling as if they were the only two people in the world.

They stopped to snuggle for a while. With her head on his chest, El could hear Mike's stomach growl very clearly. She lifted her head up and asked:

"Hungry?"

"Yeah, a little."

"What time is it?"

"*looks at watch* 1:12."

"You wanna eat something?"

"Sure. I'll make you some hot chocolate while we're at it!"

"Okay! *smiles*"

They walked to the kitchen and started fixing some bagels. Mike brought out the hot chocolate mix and milk.

"I got this," she said.

"You sure?"

"I'm sure."

intensely stares at mug

She picked up the mix and the milk with her mind and poured each of them into the mug.

stirs

She then put it in the microwave and sped up the heat by putting a hand out in front of her, her eyes staring downward. As she did this, Mike fed Eggo. When it was done heating up, he said:

"Here. Let me give it a sip."

"Okay. *pauses* How is it?"

"Perfect! Wanna try it now?"

"Sure. *takes cup* Thanks. *sips* Mmmmm...That's good!"

"See, I knew you'd like it!"

"I don't like it...I love it! *winks, takes another sip*"

smiles

El turned around to the sink to wash and dry the mug. Mike leaned against the counter by his palms, facing the opposite direction for a while, but then impatiently walked over and stood behind her. He wrapped his arms around her waist and whispered in her ear sweetly:

"*whispers* So, what do you wanna do today?"

"I wanna go outside."

"*turns to face her, holds arms* El...I don't know if that's such a good idea...It's dangerous out there."

"So? *pauses* We've snuck out there before. What's so different about today?"

"Um, let's see, there's a motherfucking blizzard out there...Oh, and then there's the Papa factor!"

Puzzled by his opposition, she removed his arms, stepped back, and crossed her arms, as she said:

"Now I see what's so different about today...It's *you*. You're being an asshole."

chuckles

"*tries to hold in laughter* It's not funny! Don't you get how important this is to me?"

"I do, I swear, I do."

"*bitterly* Mike, do you know how long it's been since I've been outside?"

"No..."

"5 days, Mike, 5!"

"5?"

"Yes, and I haven't even gotten the chance to enjoy the snow all winter!"

"Really?"

"Really."

"El, you know I want you to have everything in the world, but aren't you afraid that people will see you?"

"People *have* already seen me."

"Yeah, but what if Pap-"

"Papa's gone."

"But we don't know that for sure..."

"I know, I just do."

"*gradually raises voice* Okay, but what if I turned around for one split second and then *you* were just gone? What am I supposed to tell Hopper? That I snuck his only daughter out just to lose her again?"

"I don't kn-"

"And what about me, huh? *lowers voice* You mean everything to me. There's just no one else...If I lost you again, I would lose my goddamn mind!"

"Hey! *lays hand on shoulder* That would never happen *shakes head*...I would never let that happen. You won't lose me! You *won't*...lose me, Mike. I promise. *pauses* I'm not going anywhere, don't worry. *pauses* I can take care of myself, Mike...really."

"I know you can, but-"

"*raises voice* But nothing! Papa's gone. I've made it this far on my own, and I sure as hell can do it again. *sighs* Don't you get it, Mike? I love you so much, that sometimes it hurts! I'm just as worried about losing you. Just the thought of losing you terrifies me...but this is my battle, Mike, and I'll fight it alone."

After making her point, she sat down on the couch, exhausted from all of the fighting. Mike sat down beside her, concerned. El then looked down at her lap, as she anxiously fiddled with her fingernails.

"But that's the thing, El...You're not alone, not anymore. *grabs hands*"

silence

"El, look at me."

looks up

sighs Don't *you* get it, El? I'm not going anywhere. I'm in this, 100%! *pauses* You're not alone...Not now *moves closer*, not ever! *leans forehead against hers*

He raised his face to her forehead, kissing it, and surrounding her in a loving hug.

"You make me feel so safe."

"*chuckles* You're literally the reason why I'm safe! I don't know what the fuck is wrong with this town!"

both laugh

boops nose

"So, why don't you get changed and I'll go get the sled out of the shed."

"Really?! Okay!"

She rubbed his shoulder and took off, looking back and smiling at him as she ran off to change.

He went to the shed but soon realized that it was locked. He ran back in to ask for El's help. She came out and said:

"Step back. I got this!"

She focused her energy on it, stared downward, with her hand out in front of her, and automatically opened it after saying:

"Open sesame!"

Mike burst out laughing and dragged the sled back to the hill, with El clinging to his arm. When they arrived at the hill, Mike sat down in the sled and patted his lap for her to sit on. She smiled and settled in. He wrapped his arms around her and told her to grab the loop. She gave them a push, rubbing the blood away from her nose. Panicking a little from the impact, she held the loop up with her mind and instead tightly grabbed ahold of Mike's coat sleeves. She somehow felt so loose and free, though entangled and confined by her loving boyfriend's arms.

screams with joy

laughs

At the end of the hill, they hit a bump and toppled onto the ground, screaming and laughing.

"See, that wasn't so bad, was it?"

"Not at all. It was fun!"

nods and smiles

"C-Can we do it again?!"

"*laughs* Of course we can!"

"Should I try some tricks this time? Like spinning us?"

"That would be *totally tubular!*"

laughs

They ran back up to the hill and before proceeding, Mike looked at El and asked:

"You're sure you know what you're doing here?"

"Yes, I'm sure."

"Okay, good. I trust you."

smiles, turns, stares downward

They went down at lightning fast speed, lifted off into the air, and spun like a teacup. It was breathtaking for Mike, but then again, so was El.

17. I'm A Fool For You

It was April 1, 1985, April Fools' Day. El was at home, like always. She woke up at a little before 5:30, so she could see Hopper before he left. When she was awake, she eyed her Stormy Kromer cap, lying on the floor of her bedroom. She picked it up, recalling all of the fun things that she and Mike had done in the snow, a few days before. She remembered all of the snowflakes that fell that day and how Mike taught her to catch them on her tongue.

catches on tongue

"Ooh cool, I wanna try."

giggles

"It's cold and it tickles!"

They made it into somewhat of a contest that day, to see how long they could exchange the snowflakes in kisses without them melting. Though not successful, they still enjoyed the closeness.

She then thought about when Mike showed her how to make a snowball.

"Hey, do you wanna learn how to make a snowball?"

"Sure!"

"Okay, great. *picks up clump of snow* So, really you just grab a handful of snow and pat and shape it into a ball. *pats and shapes* Then, you can throw it at your friends."

"*picks up, pats, and shapes* Like this?"

El threw a snowball at his shoulder without lifting a finger, wiping the blood away from her nose.

"Yeah, like-Ow!" he said, rubbing his own shoulder in pain.

"Sorry, tough guy!" she said sarcastically as she walked over and

rubbed his shoulder.

Her mind then wandered to when they made snow angels, and even after that when they made a snowman.

"Why are they called snowmen and not snow people?"

"Sexism."

"Sex?"

"No, no, sexism. It means, um...when people say something offensive and untrue about all people of a specific gender. Sex also means gender, just so you know. Um, but sexism is also when people choose one gender over another for no apparent reason, like special treatment. Sexism almost always applies to women though because men have been considered superior in society since the world has existed...It really sucks though because women are just important, if not more."

"Wow. That really does suck!"

"Yeah...Sorry to totally bum you out about making a snowman..."

"Hahaha, no it's fine. I'll just make a snow*woman*!"

"Great idea!"

To top off their creation, they used some broken twigs to make extra long eyelashes and wrapped her in El's pink, floral scarf.

All of these thoughts and flashbacks of Mike led her to visit him in his present state. He was currently at home, still sound asleep in bed. She walked over to him and smiled. She stroked her hands through his hair and down his face, as she knelt beside him. Then, she whispered, "I love you, Mike" and kissed his forehead. She then left his bedroom and tapped out of her meditative state, returning to her quiet little bedroom. Then, she got up and waited at the table for Hopper. He walked over to her, kissed her head, and said:

"Good morning, kid. Did you sleep ok?"

"Yes. You?"

"Like a log."

"Nice."

"Yep. *pauses* So, we're out of eggos today...are eggs ok?"

"Sure."

"Good. I'll fix 'em right now."

The boys already taught El about April Fools' Day, of course, but March felt so long that she hadn't even realized that today was the 1st of April. Hopper had grown up with a strict, but goofy dad, so April Fools' Day was something he did every year to honor his father's legacy. This year, he thought it would be fun to prank El and see how she reacted. First, instead of making her actual sunny-side up eggs, he just had the pan heating up on the burner, while really putting half of a canned peach in some yogurt, to appear as one. Once he finished fixing them, he turned off the burner, took off the pan, and set it on the counter. He took the plate, with a knife and fork, and walked it over to El.

"Here. Eat up!"

"Thanks, Dad."

He smirked with a look of mischief and watched as she ate the botched dish.

"*gags* What is this?"

"Sunny-side up eggs, just how you like 'em. Why, do they not taste good?"

"No, they're good, it's just different than it normally tastes. Are you sure you cooked it right?"

"Yeah, just like Martha Stewart said to."

"Oh...okay."

She stared at and messed with the strange eggs with her fork, reluctant to eat them.

"Gotcha!"

"Huh?"

"What do you mean '*huh*'?! It's April Fools' Day! They're not really eggs."

"Then what are they?"

"Yogurt with canned peaches in the middle. *smiles*"

"Ohhuhho, you're gonna pay for that! How'd you come up with that anyway?"

"My father. He had quite the sense of humor. He used to play the best April Fools jokes."

"Do you miss him?"

"Terribly, *pauses* but I think he would be disappointed at who I've become if he were still here."

"Why?"

"I don't know. He just always wanted for me to be more, to be the best I could be."

"You *are* the best, Dad. If he doesn't see that, then screw him. You're good at your job, you've been nothing but great to me...what more could you be?"

"*shyly smiles* Thanks, kid. You just made my day."

smiles

El had planted her own little prank for her dad: fake dog poop. She waited in her room until he found it.

"Oh Jesus! Shit! Shit! JANE, GET THE HELL IN HERE!"

She ran out of the door, saying:

"What? What? What is it?"

"Would you take a look at this?"

"Is that-?"

"Shit? Yes, yes it is. You wanna explain to me how it got there?...Oh, yes that's right, your dumbass dog did it!"

"She's your dog too, ya know. How's this my fault?"

"Aren't you the one who let her in?"

"Yeah, I guess so..."

"Alright then. Clean this up."

"Gotcha! April Fools!"

"Huh?"

"It's fake. Steve and I got it from the dollar store."

"That little shit...Well, ya got me! *chuckles* Good one!"

"*laughs* Thanks!"

"Alright, well now that that's out of the way, why don't you call Mike and see if he wants to do anything today?"

"Really?!"

"Yeah. See if he's okay with me dropping you over there."

"Okay!"

dials

"Hello?"

"Hey, Mike! It's El."

"Hey, El! How are you?"

"I'm good, how are you?"

"I'm great! I'm glad you called."

"Me too. *smiles*"

awkward pause

"So...why *did* you call?"

"Oh, right! Well, my dad said I should call you and see if you wanted to do anything today."

"I'd love to!"

"Cool."

"Let me just ask my mom first...Wait, my place or yours?"

"My dad is kinda tied up today...Is it okay if I come over to your house?"

"Yeah, I don't think we have any plans, but let me double-check."

"Okay."

"Just a sec."

"*yells* HEY MOM? CAN EL COME OVER TODAY?"

"*yells in the distance* SURE, SWEETIE, THAT'S FINE!"

returns to phone

"She's fine with it."

"Yay! I'll be there soon."

"Take your time! There's no rush."

"Actually, there is because I need to see you...now."

blushes and smiles

"Well, I love you. See you soon!"

"See ya! Love you too."

smiles and hangs up

She walked back to Hopper, who then asked:

"What'd he say?"

"He said I could come over."

"Alright. Go get dressed and we'll motor over there."

"Okay!"

El rushed off to her room and spent approximately 15 minutes just trying to find the perfect outfit to wear. She walked out of her room wearing a crop top and short shorts that she had made, but Hopper didn't approve.

"I *know* I didn't buy you those. Go back in there and change into something appropriate!"

"*huffs* Fine."

She found Mike's old *Star Wars* t-shirt lying in one of her drawers. El had loved the trilogy after watching it for the first time with him, so he gave her a shirt of it. She decided to wear it and put on some longer jean shorts with a black belt and some Chuck Taylors.

"Much better. Now, let's get going."

They both got in the car and left. When they got there, Hopper pulled El aside and said:

"Hey!-Have fun, ok?"

"Don't worry, I will. Love you, Dad!"

"Love you too, kid."

El rang the doorbell and waited patiently. Once the door opened, Hopper drove off. Expecting to see Mike, she was surprised to find Holly answering the door.

"El!"

"Hi, Holly!"

"I missed you! *hugs legs*"

"*strokes hair* Aww, I missed you too!"

Nancy peeped from around the corner and said:

"Is that El? *raises eyebrows*"

"Hi, Nancy. How are you?"

"I'm great. It's good to see you again. *smiles, hugs*"

"You too! *pauses* Um, where's-?"

"Oh, my brother. I don't know...He's usually waiting by the door for you."

"Really?" *smiles and chuckles*

"Yeah, all the time! He usually waits a few seconds before he answers the door though, just so you won't think he's a total wastoid."

"*laughs* Aww, that's so cute!"

"Yeah, it's pretty entertaining. He just like paces around for a few minutes and gets all antsy. Anyway, he would probably kill me for telling you all of this, but let me call him real quick."

laughs

"*yells* MIKE, YOUR GIRLFRIEND'S HERE!"

"*yells in the distance* OKAY, SORRY. I'M COMING!"

both laugh

"Well, El, I gotta go, but it was good seeing you. I'll catch up with you later hopefully."

"Yeah, that'd be great. See ya, Nance!"

El bent down and picked up Holly as Mike rushed down the stairs.

"Hey, you! *kisses* Nice shirt. *winks*"

"Thanks. *winks*"

"Sorry I wasn't down here already, I was in the bathroom."

"It's fine. I didn't know that you normally waited by the door for me...That's so sweet!"

"Who told you that? Nancy? Ugh, I'm gonna kill he-Wait, really? You really think so?"

"Yeah, that's so cute."

blushes, smiles shyly at the ground

"*puts hands in pockets* So, do you wanna go upstairs or in the basement?"

"Your room."

"Okay!"

El put Holly down and said:

"Aww, don't worry, Holly! I'll play dolls with you later, I promise."

"Okay..."

Holly ran past them on the steps. As they walked up, El looked at Mike and noticed that he had some faded marks on his face.

"*circles face with finger* What's all of that?"

"Oh...Well, Holly drew marker on my face when I was sleeping this morning and woke me up at 5:30 ON THE DOT, as an April Fools

joke, so sorry if I'm a little cranky today."

"Oh my god... *laughs*"

"Yep, my little sister's mental!"

"Eh, she's not too bad. She's so cute!"

"Try living with her!"

opens door, walks in

Mike and El both lied down on the bed, on their sides, facing each other, with their cheeks leaning on their hands.

"*laughs* You know, Hopper and I played pranks on each other today too."

"Oh really? What'd you do to each other?"

"Well, he said that we were out of eggos and fixed me some *uses airquotes* 'sunny-side up eggs', but really he just took some yogurt and put half of canned peach in it."

"HAHA! Classic! And what'd you do to him?"

"You remember when I asked Steve to take me to the dollar store that one day?"

"Yeah."

"Well, I bought some fake, rubber poop to make him think that Eggo pooped in the house."

"Ooh, that's a good one! How did he react?"

"Oh my god, he was totally buggin'! It was hilarious!"

They stayed there, talking for hours and hours. When they stopped, El looked at Mike and said:

"What? What is it?"

"Nothing. I'm just looking at you."

"No, seriously. What are you thinking?"

"That you look beautiful and I really wanna kiss you right now."

He laid his hand on top of her hand resting on the bed.

"You wanna kiss me...right now?" she asked.

"Right now."

"Okay...*smiles*"

He scooted toward her, both still lying on their sides. They both leaned in, kissing each other's lips in quick, separate pecks. As pecks gradually turned into slow, romantic kisses, they started to wrap their arms around each other. As his hand accidentally slid past and lightly grazed her thigh, she pulled him closer to her. Now on her back, with Mike hovering over her, she wrapped her leg around his waist and put his hand back on her thigh. All of a sudden, the door burst open and Mike quickly peeled himself off of El, both sitting and fixing themselves up. Holly stood there and asked:

"Hey, El, can we play Barbies now?"

"Go away, Holly, we're busy," said Mike.

"I was talking to El, not you."

"Of course we can! Why don't you go back to your room and I'll meet you there?"

"Okay!"

El turned to Mike, placing a hand on his lap, and said:

"Sorry, Mike. I'll be right back. Give me 15 minutes tops."

"It takes 15 minutes to play with dolls?"

"It takes awhile for a prince and princess to get together...I just got lucky with you. *boops nose*

blushes and smiles

"And also, what are you complaining about? Doesn't it take about the same amount of time to play with your action figures?...And D&D campaigns last like 10 hours most of the time, so I'm pretty sure that you can handle waiting on us to finish playing with Barbies."

"Yeah, okay, you got me."

"EL! THE PRINCESS IS STILL WAITING IN THE TOWER!"

"Well, that's my queue! Be right back."

"Alright. Let me know if there's anything you need."

"I will."

kisses

runs off

sits criss cross applesauce

"*picks up dolls* Someday, I'm gonna find a prince and we're gonna be just like you and Mike. You guys are perfect for each other."

"Aww thanks, Holly. I think so too. You're brother...he's a really amazing person. I hope you know that."

"Yeah, he's a good brother."

"I know that he can be a bit mean to you sometimes, but don't take it the wrong way. All siblings are like that, but Mike really does love you."

"I love him too."

"Me too," said El.

"*smiles* So, what should the princess' name be, El?"

"Um...how about Leia? *giggles*"

"That's pretty! I like it."

"What about the prince?"

"*giggles* Han Solo."

"Okay. You be the prince and I'll be the princess."

"Okay."

El's childhood wasn't much of a childhood at all. Instead, it was miserable and traumatizing for her. Playtime was a place where El could be whoever she wanted and could connect with her inner child. It compensated for all of the dull moments in her life, where she felt nothing but loneliness. It was times like these when she played with Holly or when she spent time with Mike, that she felt happy at last. She was able to finally accept the way her life was, or at least her new life.

El was good at roleplaying, something she had learned from playing D&D countless times with Mike and the boys. She enjoyed using different voices and accents that she sometimes practiced at home after hearing them from television shows. This time, she settled for speaking in a British accent, in a medieval sort of way (something she learned from watching *The Princess Bride*), by saying things like, "Are you stuck, milady?" or "Alas, we shall never be parted! 'Tis the day of all days!" To Holly, it made all the difference.

"Well, I should go, but I'll see you later, Holly."

"Wait, El, don't leave! Tell me a story first!"

"Okay, fine, but it's gonna be a quick one."

"*takes a breath, speaks slowly* Once upon a time, there was a mage princess who had been held captive and poked and prodded all her life. Then, one day, she ran away from all of her problems. She was constantly on the run, being chased by bad people who wanted her dead. Along the way, she got lost. That was when a prince, her paladin in shining armor, and his men came along. It was love at first sight! He later took her in, fed her, clothed her, and gave her a place to stay...his castle. It was her first true home. He was a good friend to

her. He protected her, and in return, she saved him countless times. He later told her how he felt, that he had feelings for her, and kissed her with true love's kiss. He promised her that they would go to the ball no matter what. She saved the prince from the evil beast by slaying it, but all of their encounters quickly came to an end when she got trapped in a whole 'nother world...or so they thought. They both cried out for each other in agony and loneliness. She eventually found a way back to the world she had grown so accustomed to and found her way back to him, but she could not be seen with him because she was the most wanted person in all of the land. So, she wandered in the woods, until the head guard of the castle found her and took her in like the prince once did. He became somewhat of her own guardian and raised her for almost an entire year. During that time, the prince called out to her every day for 353 days and she heard him, though she could not approach him. Sadly, they never got to go to the ball together, but along the way, she traveled afar to visit her long-lost family, whom she had never met. She learned many things about herself but returned home when she learned that her friends, and her only love, were in serious danger. She arrived at the castle and reunited with her true love at last. She reconnected with her friends and family that same night. Afterward, she had no other choice but to stay hidden because she was still being hunted down. That all changed one night when the guard let her go to the Snow Ball, an annual winter formal held at the castle. She got ready and met the prince there, where they danced their first dance and shared their second kiss. To this day, you can still find them together, happy as ever. The End!"

"That was the best fairytale ever!"

"*giggles* I'm glad you liked it! It's my favorite too. *sighs* Well, this has been fun, but I should probably go back to your brother now. He's expecting me."

"Okay. Thanks for the story, El!"

"Anytime."

Once they were done, El went back to Mike. She peeped her head through his open door and knocked on the molding around it.

"Knock, knock," she said playfully.

"Come on in."

She walked over toward him with a smile on her face, and sat in his lap, with her arms around his neck and his holding her back.

"15 minutes, huh? More like 30!"

"Sorry! She wanted a story too."

"Of course she did...So, how was it?"

"It was fun. I love playing with kids."

"Yeah, when they're not annoying."

"They're not *that* annoying!"

"Well, maybe kids just hate me then. I mean, it makes sense, my dad's a total dud."

"C'mon, Mike. Don't be so hard on yourself...You're *nothing* like your dad, and plus, I've seen the way that Holly looks at you. She totally looks up to you because you're her big brother."

"Thanks, El! *chuckles* My theory is that I'm just so negative because I had the burden of being the middle child."

"Haha, maybe you're onto something!"

pauses

"When I was playing with her, I named the prince and the princess Han Solo and Leia!"

"*laughs* Really? You actually named my sister's dolls after *Star Wars* characters?"

"Yep."

"Aw, man. Now, my mom's gonna think that I sabotaged my sister's little game. Oh, well."

laughs

"Before I left, you know, she asked me for a story, and I had to make something up quick, so I just told her our story, but disguised it as a fairytale."

"*laughs* Oh my god! *raises eyebrows* What'd she think?"

"She said it was the best one she's ever heard!"

He threw his head back and laughed. His face then turned serious, with a streak of eagerness in his eyes. He then said:

"El, tell me our story."

"*laughs* What? Mike, are you serious?"

"I mean it. Tell me our story."

"Okay, fine."

She tried the best she could to tell it the same way she had told it before. As she went on, he smiled with glee as she described the moments in their time together. When she was finished, he said:

"Wow...She's right...*pauses* Our story is better than any fairytale because it's real and it's heartbreaking, but it's also heartwarming at the same time. Just hearing it is bringing all of these feelings back up and I don't know what to do with them! *laughs, shrugs*"

She looked him straight in the eyes and said:

"How 'bout this?"

kisses

"Y-Yeah, that'll work!"

They made out for a while, once again, until El stopped and said:

"This shirt is so comfy. Thanks for giving it to me."

"No problem. *tugs at hem of shirt* I love it when you wear my

clothes."

smiles and blushes

18. Party Hearty

It was April 2, 1985. Mrs. Wheeler had noticed that Mike was constantly spending time with the same group of friends and wished that he would branch out more. To fix this problem, she had suggested that he host a boy-girl mixer at their house, and though he protested, she made him do it anyway.

"How about 5:00-7:30?"

"*chuckles* Mom, I'm 14! Nobody sets a time for parties, you just show up when you show up. Also, nobody's going to show up to a party at 5:00 on a Friday. That just screams lame!"

"Well, I'm sorry, Michael, for taking time out of my day to help you host a party with your friends!"

"*raises voice* See, that's the thing, I never asked you to!"

"*scoffs* I'm putting 8:00 on the invitation, and that's final."

"*sighs* Fine."

She made copies of some flyers for him to pass out to people and sent them to school with him the next day. First, Mike distributed the flyers to his friends.

"What's this?" asked Dustin.

"Invitations to this party my mom's making me have on Friday... *sighs*"

"*laughs* Michael's Bodacious *Farty*?" said Lucas.

Dustin snort laughs

"Wait, what?! Let me see that! *snatches*"

Mike looked closely at the invitation and banged his head against the locker.

"I'm screwed..."

"Hey, it won't be so bad!"

"No, Will, this is hopeless! I already knew I was gonna be the mama's boy passing out mixer invitations, but now I'm gonna be the laughingstock of the whole school!"

"It's just a typo, man! Don't be such a drama queen..." said Max.

"Yeah, Mike, take a chill pill," said Lucas.

"Whatever. I still gotta hand these out. See you in class."

walks away

Will ran up to Mike and said:

"Mike, wait up!"

"*slows down* Yeah?"

"Crazy together, right?"

"Yeah, crazy together."

"Alright then, it's settled. I'm helping you."

"Thanks, Will."

smiles

They walked down the halls and Mike would stop people and say:

"Party at my place this Friday. You in? *holds out invitation*"

He got a number of responses, some meaner than others, but managed to get some yes's and maybe's every now and then. He was a respectable student, always insightful and a good partner. He was also much more popular now after he and his girlfriend terrorized Troy, the school bully, but was still a nerd at the end of the day. By the end of the day, 19 people were coming for sure, including El and his friends.

[2 days later]

It was 7:45 and Mike was setting up the basement for the party. His mom had set out some cheese nips in one bowl and carrot sticks and celery on a separate plate, with a side of ranch dressing. He huffed at the sight and replaced them with bowls of Doritos, bugles, and cheese balls. He then pitched the apple juice and grabbed some Fanta and Sprite instead. Mrs. Wheeler walked down and checked in on him.

"Hey, sweetie. How's it coming?"

"Coming along just fine."

"What's all that? What'd you do with the snacks I brought down?"

"Mom, nobody wants to eat carrot sticks and celery at a party..."

"I had no idea that the Snack Police were here. I'm sorry, officer!"

rolls eyes

"Aren't you forgetting something?"

"What do you mean?"

eyes fort

"What about it?"

"Well, don't you think you should take it down?"

"And why would I do that exactly?"

"You need to make some room for your guests."

"There's plenty of room! It would be a cool place to hang out during the party anyway."

"It's in the way, sweetie."

"Well, I can't just take it down!"

"Why not?"

"Because it was El's first home."

"I mean, El's here now, it's not like you really need it anymore, don't ya think?"

"I should keep it *especially* because El's here! We shared a lot of good memories together in that fort. If I took it down, it would be like betraying her."

"I'm sorry, sweetie. I had no idea it meant so much to you."

"It's okay, how could you have!"

"*kisses head* Alright, well, I'll let you carry on," she said and left.

Mike put on some music, as the first two guests came piling in, Kelly and Veronica, from his social studies class. Mike's mom answered the door and welcomed them in, saying:

"*yells* MIKE! YOUR FIRST GUESTS ARE HERE!"

"*yells* COMING!"

He ran up the stairs to find that the two most obnoxious girls in school, the "Totally" Girls, were in his very house...*Dustin*, he thought, of course it was Dustin's doing. He was quite the meddler. Mike then had no other choice than to lead them down to the basement, but not without a reluctant sigh.

"Sick basement, Mike!" Veronica said facetiously.

"Yeah, this is *totally* rad." Kelly chimed in.

"Thanks. This is where I usually hang out."

"I bet you bring a lot of girls here. It's *totally* a chick magnet, that's for sure. Right, Kelly?" she said facetiously.

"Yeah...*Totally*!" she said, distracted.

rolls eyes

"Well, more people are on their way, but for now it's just you two. If

you want something to drink, there's some orange Fanta or Sprite on the table."

They ignored him and talked among themselves.

"Oh my god, so did you hear about Brittany and Kyle?"

Mike crosses arms and rolls eyes

"No, what happened?"

"Oh my god, well, like, you know how Brittany was like *totally* having doubts about Kyle?"

"Yeah, *totally*!"

"Well, rumor has it that she like *totally* changed her mind and then she boned him in the back of his dad's truck!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"No!"

"Yes!"

"Shut up! Really?"

"Really!"

"Wow!"

Mike sighed, dragging his feet as he paced across the room. All of a sudden, Steve showed up with Max and the boys, and El still on the way, with Hopper driving her there.

"I'll be right back. More people are here."

"Whatever," one of them said.

He then walked upstairs and answered the door.

"Steve, where the fuck have you been?"

"Sorry, geez. Don't get your panties in a twist, Wheeler!"

"Don't mess with me, Harrington...I have the 'Totally' Girls in my basement right now."

"Sarah and Kennedy's sisters?! Oh, you poor bastard..."

"Yep...My life kinda sucks right now."

"Bring it in. *puts arms out*"

"Um, I'm good, thanks..."

"Quit being a wimp and give me a hug, dickhead!"

"Fuck it! C'mere. *hugs*"

Max snorted along with the boys. *Has Steve made Mike go soft?* she wondered. Mike then led them downstairs, where Kelly and Veronica lied in waiting. Mike tried to kick Steve out, but he insisted on checking out his basement first and maybe even stalking Nancy a bit too.

"Nice, Wheeler! *pats shoulder hard*"

"Ah! Would you quit it with that already?"

"Oh yeah...Sorry, bro."

"Mike, is this your older brother?" said Kelly, flattered.

"What? No! God no! Um...This is my-"

"Babysitter. I'm his babysitter."

"What? No, you're not!"

"C'mon man, let's just admit it for what it really is."

"No, because you're not...He's just a family friend."

"Alright, whatever. I'm his family friend. Harrington, Steve Harrington. *shakes hands* Nice to meet ya."

Mike rolls eyes

"He's kinda cute though!" said Veronica.

"Yeah, *totally*," said Kelly.

"Aha, thanks? I guess... *sighs* Well, I better get going!"

"So soon?" said Kelly.

"Yeah, unfortunately."

"You sure you couldn't say just a little longer?" said Veronica.

"Nah, I don't think so."

"Aww, c'mon, Steve! Have a little fun!"

"Alright, maybe just a little while."

Mike put a hand to his face and shook his head. More guests came piling in, but still no sign of El.

Veronica and Kelly were all over Steve. Mike looked over in the corner to find that Steve was now sitting on the couch, trying to pry them off of him as they played with his hair. He was looking for any excuse to leave. Mike noticed when Steve extended a hand out, mouthing *Help me*, but instead of helping him, he just stared, laughing hysterically, and enjoying the one bit of good that could come from this dreadful evening...Well, maybe there was one other good thing.

Mrs. Wheeler answered the door to find a familiar face. She was the last guest to arrive, but the first to stop and talk with Mrs. Wheeler.

Mike had briefly talked with his friends but didn't feel right about enjoying himself when he couldn't share it with his girlfriend. However, he was in luck.

She walked down the steps, one by one, tousling her hair in place. She started recalling her and Max's conversation about the party.

"Will this be any different than Will's birthday party?"

"Yes! This party will make all the difference. This isn't a celebration of anything, this is purely social."

"But I've been cooped up in a cabin all year!"

"Precisely! That's why we have to get you all dolled up."

smiles

"So, what do I do?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, how do I act, what do I do?"

"No acting involved. Just be yourself! That's your only job."

"Got it. *winks*"

"Oh, and don't use your powers, no matter how bitchin' it would be if you did!"

"Haha, don't worry, I won't."

She directed her eyes toward Mike, the wallflower in the corner.

"Hey, you. *smiles*"

"Goddamn, you look good!"

"*giggles* Thanks! *wraps arms around shoulders, looks into eyes* You look bored," she said with a puppy dog face.

"That's because I am. So, what are you gonna do about it?"

"I'll show you what I'm gonna do... *kisses*"

Steve had escaped Veronica and Kelly as quickly as possible, leaving

them by the couch, alone and bored.

"Who does this girl sucking Mike's face think she is?" said Veronica.

"Ooh, someone's *totally* jealous of the new girl!" Kelly sang.

"Shut up, Kelly!"

"Since when have you liked Mike?"

"*sighs* I don't know...Ever since his girlfriend came back, he's more confident and he's much less of a dork than he used to be...He's actually kinda cute!" said Veronica.

"Well, you may beat boys to a pole with your looks, Veronica, but word on the street is that she beat up Troy!"

"You serious?"

"*Totally* serious."

"Damn!"

Mike pulled away, looking into El's eyes, and saying:

"You know just how to cheer me up."

smiles, blushes

"*rubs back* Can I get you something to drink? Sprite? Fan-?"

"Sprite!"

"*chuckles* Sprite it is. *rubs shoulder, winks*"

Completely smitten, El watched Mike walk away, with the back of her head to the wall. Meanwhile, the rest of the gang walked over to El.

"Look who the cat dragged in!" said Dustin.

"You made it! *hugs*" said Max.

"Of course I did! *hugs* How are you?"

"*pulls away* I'm good. I've missed you though!"

"I've missed you too...all of you!"

Mike came back with El's drink in his hand.

"Here you go. *hands Sprite*"

"*takes Sprite* Thanks!"

"*puts hands in pockets* Hey guys. What's up?" he said.

"Nothing much. We were just telling El about how much we miss her."

"Aww. Well, we should all get together sometime soon!"

"Isn't that kinda what we're doing right now?"

"Fair point. *sighs* Man, this party sucks!"

"Don't be such a negative Nancy!" said Lucas.

"Oh, so now *I'm* negative?"

"Boys..." said El.

They had no choice but to listen to her, knowing what she did the last time they fought with each other.

"Okay fine, it sucks," said Lucas.

"You just need to get people involved in something. Like, start a game or get them dancing or something," said Will.

"He has a point..." said Max.

Mike thought a little and then shouted, as Lucas turned down the music:

"Hey everybody! Let's play Twister."

Will spun the spinner for people as they waited to make their next move.

Some random girl's foot slid under El's back, causing her and Mike to collapse. They both giggled, their faces moving toward each other, leaning in. They kissed a bit and then got up.

A lightbulb went off in Mike's head.

"Who wants to play Truth or Dare?" Mike sang.

Practically everybody in the room raised their hand, gathering in one big circle.

"I'll start first!" said Max.

"Alright, what will it be? Truth or dare?" said Mike.

"Dare."

"Why am I not surprised! *rolls eyes* Alright...I dare you to eat a scoop of cat food!"

"Cat food? You don't even have a cat!"

"You're right, I don't, but Ms. Pachkowski next door does. She has 3 cats, so there's plenty to go around!" he said with a devious smile.

El liked this new Mike, this daring Mike. This was a side of him she had never seen or noticed before.

"Alright, fine. Bring it on, Wheeler!"

"Dog food coming right up!" he said, running up the stairs.

He went next door and rang the doorbell, hoping that she would still be awake.

"*answers door* Good heavens, Michael! What are you doing up at this hour?"

"Sorry, Ms. Pachkowski. The reason I came by is that I'm having this party with my friends over at my house and-"

"Does your mother know about this?"

"Yes, she does. In fact, it was her idea that I have it."

"Alright then...Continue."

"Well, you see, we got this new cat, *pauses to think of name* Dart, and we were wondering if we could borrow some cat food. We didn't have enough time to grab some from the store today because we were preparing for the party and all."

"A new cat? Oh, how wonderful! Perhaps Dart, Misty, Suki, and Cinnamon could all play together sometime!"

"Yeah...Maybe so..."

"I'll send you off with a bag of cat food. Come on in!"

"Thanks, Ms. Pachkowski."

walks in

As she led him to the pantry, where she kept all of her cat food and toys, Mike looked around in awe. He had never seen anything like it! A house with so much crap inside, both junk and literal cat crap. Ms. Pachkowski was quite the hoarder! Her house was filled with stacks of newspapers that she never threw away, cracked picture frames filled with her and her grandchildren, pill bottles, and cat toys galore! Mike felt bad for her. She had no one. She was all alone with nobody there to understand her pain. She was lonely, like he had once been without El, the love of his life.

"Here it is! Take anything you want."

"Alright. *lugs bag of cat food over shoulder*"

He stumbled over to the door, having trouble keeping balance because of how heavy the one bag of cat food was.

"Oh, Mikey dear, don't forget to take a toy with you!"

"Oh, right...*grabs toy* Thanks again, Ms. Pachkowski."

"Anytime, son. Come back again soon!"

"Will do. See ya!"

Mike walked back over to his house as quickly as he could, but not without spilling a little cat food on the way. Luckily, he was able to make it past his prying mother and down the basement steps. Arriving at the last step, everybody cheered at the sight of cat food.

"Lucas, get me a Dixie cup, will you?" said Max.

"Anything for you, MADMAX. *winks*"

hands cup

takes cup

"Alright, hit me, Wheeler."

As Mike finished pouring the cat food into the cup, people began chanting "MADMAX! MADMAX! MADMAX!"

"What's even in cat food?" El asked.

"Fish, oil-There's no telling!"

Max chugged the little scoop from the cup, practically gagging. She crushed and dropped the cup dramatically on the ground, raising her arms in the air in victory.

everybody cheers

"Max Mayfield, you are the man! *high-fives*" said Dustin.

bows and curtsies

both laugh

Max looked at Lucas, who couldn't get a single word out.

"What is it, Lucas? Cat got your tongue?"

"You could say that again!"

"Alright, who's next?" said Will.

"I nominate Mr. Pussy over here. *points to Mike"

"Try me!"

"Truth or dare?"

"Dare."

"I dare you to kiss Will."

This very dare earned lots of oohs and surprising looks from the group.

"What?" Mike and Will said at the same time.

They looked at each other, then looked back at Max.

"You heard me! It's either that or I make you prank call Hopper."

"You really are evil! *laughs*" said Will.

"Do it, Mike! Don't call my dad," said El.

"What? You would really rather me-"

"*taps wrist* Tick tock! Time's up, Wheeler. Make your decision." said Max.

"Kissing Will it is then."

"Crazy together?" said Will.

"Crazy together!" said Mike.

He turned back to El, saying:

"Remember, it's just a game. *puts hand in lap"

"*holds hand* I know."

He lifted her hand to kiss it, then placed it back in her lap, and

looked over at Max, who said:

"Pucker up, boys!"

Mike turned to Will and then jokingly said:

"C'mere, hot stuff! *grabs by the shirt*"

Everybody laughed, including El. They all watched as the two best friends kissed for the first time. Will's mind was racing. He wondered if the rumors and talk of him being gay would get worse after sharing this moment with Mike. He also questioned whether he really felt that way or not. He had felt things with Mike that he couldn't explain, but he wasn't sure if that was just because they were such close friends or if that was really, truly how he felt about him. He knew deep down that even if that was really how he felt about Mike, that he wouldn't return his feelings because he was so deeply in love with El. Unlike Will, Mike felt nothing but awkward. El watched in awe, feeling a number of emotions. Though it was quick, it felt like it was never going to end...and then it did.

Mike and Will both pulled away. Their faces still close, Will looked at Mike straight in the eyes. Mike, feeling awkward, said:

"We good?"

"Y-Yeah...We're good."

"Good. *fist bumps*

fist bumps back

As they continued playing, people coincidentally began choosing truth over dare, having seen the extent of the dares people were given. Wondering what she was thinking, and how she would take it all, Mike slid back next to El.

"Hey, you ok?"

"Yeah, I guess...It was just a game, right?"

"Right."

"Then, yeah, I'm fine."

"You sure you don't need some reassurance?"

"Well, that depends...What did you have in mind? *smiles*"

"*takes hand* I'll show you. *clears throat, raises voice* We'll be right back, guys."

He led her to the bathroom, where she said:

"This is your idea of a romantic make-out spot?"

"What? No, no. I just couldn't take you upstairs because my mom would fuss over the fact that I wasn't socializing with my classmates and instead was spending time with my girlfriend like I always am... *rolls eyes, sighs* Figures."

"Figures?"

"It's just this expression that you say when someone does something typical, especially if you are unhappy about it."

"Oh, I see."

She looked around in the bathroom, thinking back to the time when she first used it to change out of her clothes, and Mike tried to give her the space that she needed, though she didn't want to feel trapped by the closed door. He kept it cracked for her, making her feel comfortable once again. Then, she thought of the second time she entered it, in order for Mike to get her cleaned up after she saved him on the cliff. In that moment, he felt glad that she was home, for she was his home, and she too felt glad to be home because he too was *her* home. In that moment, she broke the space between them and walked over toward him, not knowing what she was doing, but knowing what she was wanting-A kiss from Mike. Now, she found herself in the same room, not knowing what to expect, or let alone, what was going to happen next. She looked at him, knowing that everything in her life was good, and immediately felt calm. He moved closer to her until they were eye-to-eye. He picked her up and started to carry her to the wall. El stopped him, laying a hand on his shoulder, and asking:

"What are you doing?"

"C'mere, hot stuff!" he said, earning some giggles from El.

He pulled her closer to his body, her legs wrapping around his waist. She could feel her heart beating out of her chest as he brushed his lips against hers, switching his head from the left to the right. She threw the arms that were around his back, onto his shoulders and around his neck, pulling his face closer to hers, as she tugged at his hair. She liked the feeling of his warm palm against her silky, smooth skin. He moved his head to her neck, where he kissed it ever so gently. She let out a sigh of pleasure and grabbed a chunk of his hair. Then, she kissed his neck and their faces returned to each other. He kissed her with a passion like no other. It all felt like one big fantasy. She felt as though she was floating. He then lowered her from him, not altering his gaze. She then took him by the hand and they both went back out to the party.

"Hey, guys. Sorry about that."

I'm not! El thought in her mind.

"7 Minutes In Heaven? More like 17!" said Dustin.

"Seriously? We were in there for that long?"

"*giggles, blushes* Guess so!" she said shyly.

"Well, El, you're the only person who hasn't gone yet. You up for the challenge?" asked Veronica.

"Hell yeah!" she said, earning a wink from Dustin.

"Alrighty then. Truth or dare?"

"Truth."

"What's your biggest secret?"

Mike raised his eyebrows, afraid of what she might say next. He knew deep down that she would never reveal her tricks, nor her past to the whole group. She knew better than that. He sat back and

watched as she came up with a response.

"*gulps* My real name is Jane."

At first, it scared him that she would reveal this, but he waited to see how people would react before he jumped to conclusions.

everyone gasps

"No shit? You serious?"

"Yep."

"Then, why do you go by El?"

"It's a long story, but it's Mike's nickname for me *puts hand in his lap* and for a long time, it's the only name I'd ever known."

She looked up at him and smiled. He couldn't help but smile back, wrapping his arms around her when she was no longer facing him. She held onto the arms that held her in comfort.

"What's your secret to such a strong relationship?" said Veronica.

"Understanding," said Mike.

"And honesty," El added.

Everyone looked up to them, even Max and Lucas. It was almost as if they were pros, though they had been together just as long as them. Will, however, looked at them in jealousy. Whether it was jealousy of their relationship or jealousy of El, he did not know-All he knew was the indifference he felt toward it.

When things ramped down, Mike guided El toward a crowd of people, encouraging her to mingle with his peers.

"But I don't want to leave you all alone in the corner..."

"Don't worry about me. This your night! Go, have fun, make some friends!"

"Thanks, Mike. *takes deep breath* Alright, I'm going in!"

He kissed her cheek and stepped back, watching her from afar as she socialized with his classmates.

"So, I hear you're homeschooled," said Debbie.

"Yes, I am," she said.

"What's that like?" asked Blake.

"To be honest, it's not easy. I have a lot of time to myself while my dad's at work, but I have to spend a lot of that time doing homework."

"Aww, I'm sorry to hear that. Well, at least you don't have to deal with annoying teachers or embarrassing moments in class..." said Blake.

"*giggles* Yeah, I guess that's true."

"Well, do you think that you'll be going to public school sometime in the future?" asked Debbie.

"Actually, my dad is helping me apply for public school right now. I'll be enrolling at Hawkins High with everyone else next year!"

"That's fantastic! Can't wait!" said Debbie.

"Yeah, you'll have to come and find us at lunch next year!" said Blake.

"If she even has time for us..." said Debbie.

"Of course I'll have time for you guys!" she said.

"I don't know...I'm pretty sure that you'll be the most popular girl at school with those mad social skills of yours," said Blake.

"Yeah, for real," said Debbie.

She was surprised by their kindness. She had never met anybody who complimented her on her social skills before. If anything, that was her *one* weakness.

"Thanks, guys! *sighs* Well, it was nice talking to you. I'm looking

forward to seeing both of you at school next year...Hopefully I'll see you before then though."

"Definitely," said Stephanie.

"Bye, El. *lifts Dixie cup*"

"Bye, guys. *waves*"

She walked back over to Mike, sliding down the wall, to meet at his level.

"This really isn't your scene, is it?"

"No, not at all, but I'm glad that it is for you. You've definitely branched out over these past few months."

"Haha, well, I'm not so sure about that."

"No, really you have! *laughs* It's a *good* thing, El. You should give yourself some credit."

smiles

The next song on his mixtape played, *Don't You (Forget About Me)*.

"You remember this song?"

She looked in plain space, thinking back to the time they first heard it at the movies.

"Yeah, on our double date with Max and Lucas, when we saw *The Breakfast Club* together, right?"

"Yep. *smiles*"

He suddenly stood up, extending his hand out to El and saying:

"Wanna dance, beautiful?"

"I'd love to."

She grabbed his hand and he pulled her up to her feet. She wrapped

her arms around his shoulders, looking him straight in the eyes. He moved his hands from around her waist to further up on her back, pulling her closer to him. She swayed back and forth to the music with him, leaning her head on his shoulder. The party ended right then, but their dancing didn't.

19. Holy Love

Hey guys. If you hadn't already noticed, I went a little crazy with the last chapter. 🤪 Sorry if I shocked you with the whole Byler kiss thing. To be honest, I don't even know if *I* was ready for that chapter, but I just wanted to explore the ship a little since some people really like it. Plus, I needed a good dare and it's fun to stir things up every once in awhile. Anyway, I hope you enjoy this soft Mileven chapter. Once again, feel free to comment because I love hearing from you guys. Toodles!

It was Saturday, April 6, 1985, what some would call Easter's Eve. Mrs. Wheeler had just come back inside, after having had a chat with Ms. Pachkowski next door. She stormed into Mike's room, furiously.

"Michael Theodore Wheeler!"

Uh oh! She used my full name! I'm screwed... he thought.

"I just had a conversation with Ms. Pachkowski next door..."

Oh shit...Fuck! he thought.

"You wanna explain to me why she thinks that we have a cat named Dart?"

"Uh...Well, you see..."

"Spit it out, Michael!"

"Okay, fine...Well, the other night at the party, we started a game of Truth or Dare, and I dared Max to eat cat food, so I had to go get some from Ms. Pachkowski."

"Michael! That is not the way you interact with your guests!"

"But Mom, she's my friend! Friends pull that stuff with each other all the time."

"But it doesn't look good for the host to do such things."

"Well, it was the hit of the party!"

"That doesn't make it right and what have we talked about with the lying?"

"I know...I just wanted to keep my friends entertained."

"Not only did you lie, but you played a poor old woman who didn't know any better!"

"I know. I feel awful, Mom, I really do. I'm sorry."

"That's okay, Michael, but just do better next time, okay?"

"I will, I swear."

"No need to swear. I believe you. *strokes cheek, puts hair behind ear* You're a good kid, Michael, you know that? *sighs* Just don't pull this crap again, okay?"

"I won't, don't worry. *pauses* You know, I wanna make this right. I think I'm going to help Ms. Pachkowski clean out her house."

"I think that's a fabulous idea! *sighs* Look, I know that you're really dreading going to church tomorrow, so why don't you give El a call and see if she wants to meet us at the service tomorrow."

When she mentioned El's name, his eyes immediately lit up and he was a whole new person. He listened intently as she went on.

"Really? You mean it?"

"Of course I do. Oh, and don't forget to invite her to brunch with us too!"

"Okay, I'll do that right now."

Mike rushed downstairs and picked up the phone to call El.

dials

rings

"Hello?"

"Hey, El."

"Hi, Mike!"

"How are you?"

"Great, now that you called."

"*smiles* I'm glad. Well, I was calling because I was wondering if you wanted to go to church with me tomorrow for Easter. My mom's kind of forcing my whole family to go, but it would be much more fun if you were there with us...with me."

"Yeah, I'd like that. I just have to ask my dad first, but I'm sure he'll be fine with it. I don't really see how I could be in any danger at church. *chuckles*"

"Sounds good. *chuckles* Yeah, the church is a pretty safe place. I think you would be fine."

"So, what is it like? My dad's not really the church-going type."

"Well, it's really quiet. You walk in and an usher will hand you a bulletin, which is basically like this booklet that tells you about the plan for the service and which songs you'll be singing and all that."

"There's s-singing? I thought you said it was quiet," she asked nervously.

"Well, it is, but there are parts in the service when you sing these tunes called hymns, which are basically the same thing as songs, but they're all about Jesus and God and stuff."

"Oh. So, everybody sings them?"

"Yeah, everybody sings them together. Oh, and like I said, it's really quiet, and part of the reason why is for prayer and listening to the sermon that the pastor gives."

"S-sermon?"

"Yeah, it's like the speech that the pastor gives to make a point and it sort of relates scripture from the bible to real life...It can be kind of boring at times...and *long*!"

"I see. Well, what should I wear?"

"You'll need to wear a dress and nice shoes."

"Oh okay...I-I'm afraid I'm going to embarrass myself somehow."

"Don't worry, I'll be with you the whole time."

"I know, that's why I wanna go," she said with a smile.

"That's why I want you to be there," he said back with a smile.

"Oh, and also if you're able to go to church with us tomorrow, or even if you aren't, we'd love it if you could join us for brunch afterward."

"What's brunch?"

"Brunch, it's like **pauses** when you have a meal instead of and in between breakfast and lunch.

"Oh! I've had that before. Sounds fun! I'll get back to you about that later on today."

"Ok, great."

"So, how are *you*? What's new?"

"I'm great. Well, Will and Max have gotten me into drawing lately, so I've been doing a little bit of that."

"Really? That's so cool. What kind of stuff do you like to draw?"

"Sometimes D&D characters, sometimes people. Really just depends."

"Could you draw me?"

"Yeah, totally. I'd like that."

"Cool."

"How are things with your dad after the whole thing with Ms. Byers and him went down a couple of weeks back? Are things still awkward?"

"No, not too bad actually. It's given Will and I some more time to get to know each other and hang out and I love Joyce, so I mean, it's not so bad."

"That's great. Yeah, Will's been saying how much fun he's having hanging out with you. He told us the other day about when he tripped and fell over a lamp cord and you laughed so hard that orange juice came spurting out of your nose. *chuckles*"

"Oh my gosh! *laughs* Yeah, it was so funny. He was just blabbing on about something and then he just randomly tripped in mid-sentence!"

"*laughs* Yep, that sounds like him. He's so small, that sometimes I worry about him like he's gonna get hurt or something."

"Me too! I mean, he did manage to get trapped in the Upside Down...Poor thing!"

"*laughs* True, true. *pauses* I love how it feels like such a long time ago, that now we can just look back and laugh at how crazy things used to be."

"I do too, haha."

"Wow. It's weird to think about the fact that I met you over a year ago...It feels like its only been a few months."

"I know! Even it had been just a few months, I would've been fine with it. Things were so bad before you..."

"I know. I still can't imagine all that shit you went through...but I'm glad you're here now."

"*smiles* Me too. *smiles, sighs* Hey, I'll call you back later when I find out about tomorrow, okay?"

"Okay. Talk to you later!"

hangs up

El walked over to the couch and sat next to Hopper.

"*tousles hair* Hey, kid. Who were you talking to just now?"

"Mike."

"Ah. What'd he want?"

"Why do you always assume that he wants something?...Okay, fine, maybe he did, but still. *chuckles* Um, he was wondering if I was able to go to church with him and his family tomorrow and then brunch afterward?"

"You know how I feel about church, kid..."

"*rolls eyes* Yeah, that it's just one big loony bin that's only true practice is brainwashing, I know, but Mike doesn't like it either and he has to go."

"Well, that's Mike's family, not ours."

"But Dad!"

"I'm sorry, kid. I'm just not comfortable with it, but I have no problem with you going out to brunch with the Wheelers."

"*nods* Compromise."

"Compromise."

"Okay...I guess that's something."

"How 'bout we go get a new dress for you to wear to brunch?"

"Y-You're taking me shopping? You hate shopping!"

"Yeah, but I love *you*."

"*smiles big* I love you too, Dad! *hugs* So much."

"*pats back* Alright, let's go!"

"Wait, let me just change out of my pajamas first."

"Yeah, you don't wanna go to the store in *those* bunny slippers!"

sticks tongue out

El put on a color-blocked blouse with corduroy shorts and rainbow-strapped flip flops. Rainbows always made her think of her mother. Wearing them was a way of keeping her close.

She walked out of her room, sliding a pair of aviators on, ones that matched her own father's, which he purposely bought to help hide her identity.

"Let's go," she said.

They cruised over to the town square, listening to Jim Croce the whole way there. As *New York's Not My Home* played, El turned to Hopper and said:

"Can I ask you a serious question?"

"Yeah, sure, kid. What's up?"

"If things were different and if you could, would you have wanted to raise me from when I was a baby?"

"I've never thought about that before. *sighs* Well, I would certainly want you to have had a proper family and not to have lived in the hellhole that you did, but I did love Sara...a lot, and I wouldn't give up my years with her."

"Would you want to change the fact that she died?"

"Do I wish what happened to her never happened? Sure, I do, but then I never would've met you or let alone, been able to raise you now!"

smiles

"I'm glad that I got to be Sara's dad because now I feel like I know what I'm doing and I can be a better father to you with that under my belt."

"*smiles* Except you skipped the whole teenage, puberty part with her. *chuckles*"

"Yeah, thankfully!"

"Hey! *playfully hits* I'm not *that* moody!"

"No, you're right...It could be a lot worse. *winks*"

smiles

When *You Don't Mess Around with Jim* came on, El sang along. She knew the whole song by heart, having picked up the lyrics from the many times she and her father had listened to it together. She nudged him until he sang along with her, both mimicking the part where he mumbles "Jimmy come boppin' in off the street". They threw their heads back in laughter after doing so. It's funny how despite the fact that they weren't related to each other and had completely different backgrounds, they could still connect so well and were so alike in many ways.

They finally arrived at the town square, they walked around hand-in-hand, for she was proud to be the sheriff's daughter. That's all people ever knew her as, Chief Hopper's new adopted daughter, but hardly anyone knew her name, nor ever saw her. Shopping was one of the few times she could be out in public.

They both ducked into a store called Prissy Polly's. Even the name made Hopper wanna gag, but he knew that El needed a nice dress if she was planning on having lunch with the Wheelers. He stood and watched as she rummaged through the racks of clothes, gathering a pile of them in her arm. When the pile got to the point where she could barely carry it with her own two arms, Hopper said:

"Alright, that's enough. Now, go try some on for me."

"*sighs* Fine..."

She walked into the dressing room, pulling the curtain behind her. She tried on numerous ones, each seeming a little less like her than the rest. She picked up the last one, afraid that it wouldn't fit, and put it on. It was a poofy, short-sleeve dress, with floral taffeta fabric. She slid the curtain to the side and walked out, giving Hopper the same look she gave Mike once before when she tried on a dress for the first time. He looked her up and down and said tearfully:

"That's the one."

"What? What is it?"

"Nothing. You're just growing up to be a beautiful young lady."

"Thanks, Daddy. *hugs*"

She looked in the mirror and smiled, thinking about when she asked Mike if she was still pretty after losing her wig. She went back into the dressing room and changed back into her clothes, placing her sunglasses on her forehead.

"That'll be \$26 and 25¢," said the cashier

pulls out wallet

hands money

"Thank you, sir. Have a prissy day!"

As they walked out of the store, Hopper mumbled to El under his breath:

"Yeah, more like a pissy day..."

She snickered to herself as she slid her aviators down over her eyes.

Though Hopper was a tough cookie to crack, he had a bit of a soft side that El was able to bring out in him. As *I'll Have To Say I Love You In A Song* played on the way home, Hopper started to change his mind about letting El go to church with the Wheelers. He turned to her and said:

"*sighs* I'm gonna regret saying this, but you can go to church with that Wheeler boy and his family tomorrow."

"What changed your mind?"

"You did, kid. I don't want to deprive you of having this experience. It's an important experience to have at some point in your life. *sighs* Besides, I haven't been in years...Maybe it's changed a bit since I've been there. *pauses* Who knows, maybe I'll even go myself and sit with Joyce and the boys."

"*gasps* You totally should!"

"*sighs* I'll think about it."

"Okay. *smiles*"

When they arrived home, El called Mike back.

"Hello?"

El recognized that this was a woman's voice and said:

"Oh, hi, Mrs. Wheeler. May I please speak to Mike?"

"Sure, sweetie. One moment please... *yells* MICHAEL? PHONE!"

He ran over, his mother handing him the phone.

"Hello?"

"Hey, you."

"Hey there! How are you?"

"Still doing great, *chuckles* and you?"

"Same here. *pauses* So, did you find out whether or not you can come tomorrow?"

"Yes. It took some convincing, but I can come to both. He might even go himself with Joyce!"

"*snickers* That's definitely out of character for him!"

"*chuckles* I know! I just can't wait to see him in a suit! *laughs*"

"*laughs* Well, my mom's going to be thrilled when I tell her that you're coming with us tomorrow. I can't wait to see you."

"*blushes* I can't wait to see you too!"

"*smiles* Well, have a good rest of the day. I love you."

"Love you too. Bye, Mike."

"Bye. *hangs up*"

Hopper laid out his suit for the morning to come. He and El both spent the rest of the day completing house chores, playing games, eating lunch and dinner, and watching television together.

The next day, Hopper and El both got up and ate breakfast together, like always, and then got ready for the church service. He wore a charcoal grey suit and pastel-colored tie, his police badge pinned to his coat's front pocket. As he was fixing his tie in the mirror, El came in behind him, wrapped her arms around his waist, and said:

"You look handsome, Daddy."

"Thanks, kid. You look lovely."

smiles, lets go

"Wait a minute. I have something I wanna show you."

"Okay."

He took her to the kitchen, where he had set up an easter basket for her when she was getting dressed.

"An Easter basket?" she asked.

"Yep. *pauses* It was the best I could do. I hate holidays like Easter even more than church itself because everybody over-commercializes it and makes it into something it's not...But, since you've never gotten

to experience Easter as a child, I figured I'd have the Easter bunny pay you a little visit."

"Wow, I don't know what to say. Thank you, Dad."

"Sure thing, kid."

Shortly after, they made their way to church, running a little late. Meanwhile, Mike sat in the aisle with his family, checking his watch anxiously and continuously.

"*whispers* You sure she's coming, sweetie?" Mrs. Wheeler said.

"*whispers* Positive. She's probably just running a little late since she lives so far."

nods

Two minutes later, El and Hopper burst through the doors, causing a commotion. Everyone's heads turned back in their direction, including Mike's, looking at a lovely, but mortified El. Then, they turned away, directing their attention back to Pastor Charles. She thought back to the time when she and the boys had burst through the gym doors of Hawkins Middle during an assembly for Will. That same feeling of social anxiety all came crying back to her in that moment. She quietly and nervously walked over to the aisle where Mike was waiting for her, while Hopper walked to the aisle where Joyce was and sat down beside her.

"Hi," he whispered.

"*playfully hits* What are you doing here?" Joyce whispered back.

"I don't know. I just thought I'd join you today if that's okay."

"It's more than okay, it's great!"

"If I'm being totally honest, I also came to keep an eye on this one.
points to El"

"Ah, I see."

"Mike and his family invited her to join them and-"

"Shhh!" someone said.

Hopper let out a yawn and stretched his arm out around Joyce. She turned and looked at him like he was crazy, saying:

"*whispers* You haven't changed at all. *laughs*"

"*whispers* Neither have you. *smiles*"

smiles

Meanwhile, El sat beside Mike and whispered:

"Hey..."

"*whispers* Hey, you okay? *puts hand in lap*"

"Yeah, didn't mean to interrupt though."

"*lifts hand from lap, flicks it in air* Don't worry about it. *pauses* You look great!"

"Thanks."

They both sat and listened to the children's sermon together. El enjoyed watching the little kids respond to Pastor Charles and laughed at the silly things that they said along with the rest of the congregation. She looked at Mike, reaching for his hand, which she held throughout the entire service. When it was time for them to sing hymns, he whispered in her ear:

"This is the part where we sing."

She looked at him and smiled, whispering back:

"Okay."

He pulled her up by the hand. She grabbed the hymnal and flipped through it to the number that Pastor Charles instructed them to, which just so happened to be #353. Mike wrapped his arms around her waist, his chin lying on her shoulder, as he looked at the hymnal

from over it. When he sang, she could feel his vocal cords vibrating against her, his voice much lower now than when she had first met him. She took comfort in his rich voice and the warmth of his arms. She sang like a canary, a soft soprano. He closed his eyes as he listened to the beautiful sounds coming out of her mouth. They would lightly sway to the music together, giggling. When the song ended, he kissed her on the cheek and let go of her as she put away the hymnal and they sat down together. Then, he held her hand once again. During the sermon, he put his arm around her as she leaned her head against his shoulder, tired and lost in thought. At the end of the service, Mike showed El around the church and taught her more about it. He brought her to the cross, which was covered with flowers that people had brought in to contribute to it. Pastor Charles had said that they could take some home at the end of the service, which was Mike's reason for bringing her over to it.

"Wow. They're so...beautiful!"

"Which one's your favorite?"

She pointed to the rose and said:

"This one."

Perfect. he thought as he grabbed it, tearing the thorns off.

"You know, roses are kind of a symbol of love and romance," he said as he placed it behind her ear.

smiles and blushes

Then, she grabbed another rose from the cross, tore off the thorns, and slipped it inside his coat pocket, where a pocket square would normally be. He looked down at it and smiled. She lifted his chin up with her finger and leaned in to kiss him. Then, he extended his arm out to her and she linked on, as the two happily walked out of the church together. By the time they were outside, she turned to him and said:

"Hey, can we go say bye to my dad real quick before we leave?"

"Yeah, of course."

"Thanks. *kisses cheek*"

She walked over to Hopper and Joyce with him and said:

"Hey, Dad. Hi, Joyce!"

"Hey, sweetheart! *hugs*" said Joyce.

hugs

"Mike. *nods*" said Hopper.

"Looking sharp, sir!" said Mike.

"Thank you, young man."

"Well, I think we'd better get going if we're gonna make it to that reservation."

"Yeah, we'll see you later, Dad."

"Okay, you two. Bye now."

As they walked away, Joyce whispered:

"Don't be so stern with him, Hop. He's a very nice boy and he loves your daughter very much."

"That's exactly *why* I'm stern with him! It's just a father's instinct, Joyce, I can't explain it."

"But you were making him so nervous...He was sweating like a pig because of you! *sighs* Don't you remember what it was like to be young and in love?"

"Yes, very well," he said, looking at her and smiling.

One of the many ways that they flirted was by bickering like an old, married couple. It was their way of keeping each other in check. Then, one thing led to another, and bickering turned into playful banter, which then turned into even more flirting.

Meanwhile, El rode with Mike and his family to Olive Garden. In the

car, Mike explained to her how everything worked there.

"So, El?"

"Yes."

"Olive Garden's different from other restaurants. They kind of do their own thing there. Do you want me to tell you a little bit about it?"

"Yes."

"Okay, so I actually don't know, have you ever been to a sit-down restaurant before?"

"No, only a diner and McDonald's really."

"That's right. Well, even though this is a chain restaurant, it's much fancier than a diner. At Olive Garden, it's almost always busy, so it's best to make reservations. They serve Italian here."

"I'm excited to try it."

"Yeah, you're going to love it. And so, ordering the food is just the same as at a diner, but then they'll come over and sprinkle as much parmesan as you want on your dish! It's awesome!"

giggles

Karen smiled to herself as she listened to how Mike talked to his girlfriend. He was so considerate and thoughtful, always wanting to know her thoughts and opinions. This was something that she had taught him very well over the years. He had a tendency to be moody, but despite that, he was still growing up to become a dear young man. Nancy turned around and said:

"You guys are gross...*sighs* But adorable," Nancy said.

They both giggled and smiled at each other.

When they arrived at Olive Garden, Mike pulled out El's chair for her.

"Thanks" she said.

"How come you don't give me this kind of treatment?" said Nancy, across the table from him.

"Because you're annoying as hell!"

"Hey! LANGUAGE!" said Ted...The first thing he had said all day.

"Sorry," Mike said quietly, with El beside him, trying to hold in a laugh.

He held her hand beneath the table, rubbing her thumb as she struggled to make her order.

"Um...I'll have fettu- *glances at menu* f-fettu-fettucine alfredo please," she said shyly.

"Alright. *writes down, takes up menu* And for you sir?"

"I'll have the same."

"2 fettucine alfredos. *writes down, takes menu* And you ma'am?"

The waiter continued on, taking the orders of each and every one of them. After he left, El helped Holly color the characters on her kid's menu. When the food came, El looked at in awe. She had never seen something so scrumptious-looking in her life...Well, besides eggos. Mike watched as she took her first bite. She turned to him, wide-eyed, and said:

"Oh my god! That's incredible!"

"See, I knew you'd like it!"

El again helped Holly out, by cutting her food for her.

"Your girlfriend's quite the babysitter, Michael."

"That she is," he said with a smile, putting his arm around her.

"So, El, how's school going for you?"

"It's good. I really like learning new things."

"That's very good. What's your favorite subject or thing that you've learned about so far?"

"Um...Probably science."

"You and Michael have that in common. *waves fork at them, cuts food* You know, he's the top of his class!"

"Mom!" said Mike.

"What? It's true! You should be proud, Michael. It's a big achievement!"

sighs

"No, I didn't know that!" she said happily, turning to an embarrassed Mike, looking into his big, beautiful brown eyes, and smiling.

Then, she brought up her schooling situation:

"You know, I'm actually going to be going to public school next year, so I'll be attending Hawkins High with Mike."

"Oh, how wonderful! Isn't that great, honey?" she said, nudging Mr. Wheeler.

"Yeah, tha-that's great...Mmm! You know, this food is so good!" he said.

Mrs. Wheeler cut her eyes at him.

"What? What'd I do?" he said.

"*sighs* How's your father?" Mrs. Wheeler continued.

"He's doing great. We've spent a lot of time together lately and it's been nice."

"That's very good. You know, he and Joyce make such a lovely couple. I remember when they used to date back in high school."

"Wait, really?"

"Oh, you didn't know?"

"No, I didn't."

"Oops, maybe I said too much."

"No, you're fine. That's just funny though."

"Yeah. They've always been very close."

"Huh," she said, as she pondered the idea of her dad and his girlfriend, young and in love, like that of her own relationship.

When they were all finished eating, Mike grabbed a handful of the mints and gave them to El, for them both to share.

"These are the mints I was talking about!" he said, with a mouthful of chocolate.

She giggled and took one.

"Mmm...They're delicious!"

"Right?!"

They ate the rest until Mrs. Wheeler asked them to go over to the gazebo so that she could get a picture of them. Nancy looked at Mike and snickered, as he fought his mother over bringing a camera.

"Do you just carry that thing around with you everywhere?" Mike asked bitterly, as she pulled out her Polaroid camera.

"Only on special occasions!" she responded.

"*rolls eyes* Alright then."

"Okay, now get closer you two. Don't be shy!"

both move closer

"A little closer."

both move closer

"Closer."

They moved closer once again, with Mike wrapping his arms around El, and El pressing her cheek against his.

"Perfect! Right there! Alright now, smile, you two! Say cheese!"

"Cheese!" they both said.

"Perfect!" she said, lightly shaking it after it came out of the camera.

She turned to Mr. Wheeler and said:

"Isn't that nice, Ted?"

"Very sweet," he said, surprisingly.

Mike and El walked over and looked at the picture together.

"I love it," said El.

"Me too," he said with a smile, playing with her hair.

"May I keep it?" asked El.

"Of course you can! I took several anyway. Pick your favorite!" said Mrs. Wheeler.

She looked at each of them and picked out her favorite one, sticking it in her clutch purse. As they drove her back to her house, Mike pulled out a plastic Easter egg from his pocket and handed it to her.

"What's this?" she asked.

"Just open it! Happy Easter, El," he said.

She opened it up to find a mini Butterfinger candy bar and a folded piece of paper.

"*gasps* Butterfinger, my favorite! How'd you know?!"

"*laughs* I saw you eyeing them at the store one time."

"Thank you!...And what's this? *lifts paper*

"Why don't you unfold it and see?"

"Alright."

She opened it up to find that it was a small picture that he had sketched of her.

"*gasps* Mike, this is beautiful!"

"You really think so?"

"I know so!"

smiles

"I'm gonna keep it forever. Thank you! *hugs*

She spent the rest of the ride taking comfort in leaning her head against his shoulder. She felt as though someone other than the Wheelers was watching over them. Perhaps it was God.

20. You & Me in DC

Hey guys. I hope you enjoy this chapter...especially the itinerary! 😊

Back in February, the teachers at Hawkins Middle had started to mention the 8th grade trip to Washington, D.C. to the students and parents. Mike, being the giant history nerd that he was, was looking forward to it. He couldn't wait to visit all of the famous sites, historical landmarks, and museums, but also felt guilty that he and all of his friends were able to see such incredible things together, which his own girlfriend would never get to experience. The more he talked about it, the more bummed out she got, thinking about how much she would miss him when he was gone and how much she herself wanted to go on the trip.

He realized that it wasn't only El that would have to miss out on an opportunity like this, but rather every homeschooled kid in the county. He decided to negotiate with the principal and teachers, to see if they could start a program that would allow homeschooled kids to join public school students on the 8th grade trip. This had never been done before, but he was ready for the challenge. Though he knew that this would take a lot of work and fundraising to be able to execute, he was determined and pleased about the good deed that he was doing. It took some convincing, but he was able to get Hopper on board with the operation, by getting Joyce and his own mom to chaperone for the trip.

Mike was recently voted the student body president. With this position, he was able to have even more influence over the decisions that affected students at the school. This particular issue was something that Mike was passionate about, something that he kept close to his heart, so much so, that he even included it in his campaign. The principal and teachers were very impressed with his proposal and agreed to start what he called the "Homeschool Travel" program.

Before April 7th, the deadline for donations, Mike did everything he could to obtain the required sum for the new program. He fundraised at school every other Friday and earned a little money on the side by

doing chores for his neighbors. Luckily, he was able to meet the requirement. His first instinct, of course, was to call El and tell her the great news, which is just what he did.

dials phone

rings

picks up to answering machine

"Hey there. You have reached-" said Hopper.

"El and Jim Hopper," said El.

"We can't come to the phone right now, but if you leave us a message, we'll give you a call back."

awkward pause

"*whispers* That's your queue, kid."

"H-Have a nice day!" said El.

The recording ended with Eggo letting out a single bark and both of them laughing. Mike had hardly ever caught her on the answering machine before, but even when he had in the past, he had never heard *this* voicemail message. *It has to be new*, he thought. He loved the message because it was very much like them. He began to leave her a message.

"Hey, El. It's me, Mike. It's 3:15 pm...um...Haha, 3:15! *sighs after laughter* Anyway, I just wanted to tell you to...PACK YOUR BAGS BECAUSE YOU'RE GOING TO D.C. WITH US IN 6 DAYS! Call me back when you get this. Love you! Oh, and cute message by the way! Okay, bye."

hangs up

After calling her, he continued on with his day, informing his parents of the status of the program as of then and working on his homework. At the time that he called her, El was walking her dog around the perimeter of her house. She rarely ever used a leash if she

could avoid getting caught. Instead, she held onto her dog with her mind and guided it along the way. It felt more natural that way, it made her feel connected somehow. She walked into the house at the very end of his message as he was just about to hang up. She ran toward the phone, shouting:

"Oh, no no no! Dammit."

She fell down into her chair and sighed, Eggo lying down by her feet. She tried calling him back, but there was no answer. She then left him a message herself.

"Mike? It's me. Sorry, I was out walking Eggo and just caught the end of your message. So, is it true? I can actually go to D.C. with you?! *squeals* Ah, I can't wait! Call me back! Love you!"

hangs up

After hanging up, she crouched down to the floor where Eggo was. She brought her face closer to her own, looking her in the eyes, and saying:

"*endearing baby voice* Are you gonna miss me, Eggo? Cuz I'm gonna miss you, *moving her own head side-to-side & nosing her* yes I am!"

She continued:

"Don't worry though, I'll be back before you know it, I promise!"

At around 5:30, Hopper came home. El unlocked the door completely and ran over to him.

"Hey, ki-"

"Oh my gosh, Dad! Guess What?"

"Wha-?"

"*high-pitched voice* Mike raised enough money, so I can go to D.C.! I'm so excited. All of my friends are gonna be there, but oh my gosh I'm gonna miss you and-"

"Whoa, whoa whoa! Slow down, honey...Only the dogs can hear you now!"

She gave him a weird look as she tried to analyze his joke.

"So, let me get this straight...Mike's program for homeschooled kids worked out and now you can go to D.C.?"

"Yep, pretty much."

"Well, that's awesome, kid. I'm happy for you. We'll have to talk about what this all means later. Our nation's capital is a very secure place, and there will be new rules put in place, young lady, *but* that can wait. I say this calls for a celebration!"

"But where?"

"Tell you what, how 'bout we pick up some McDonald's and rent a movie. How does that sound?"

"Sounds perfect!"

"Alrighty then. Ready to go?"

"Yep, let's go."

By the time Mike was finally able to listen to her message, they had both left the house. He was sorting things out with the new program and its organization, as well as telling his parents the great news. He decided to call her back anyway.

"Hey. We keep missing each other! How funny because I actually miss you right now...a lot. *clears throat* Anyway, yes, you are going to D.C. with me and everyone else, and for the record, I couldn't be happier. This was definitely the best victory out of all of the achievements that came from my campaign this year...*smiles* And besides, you'll finally get a taste of what it's like to be a public school stu-"

cuts off

"Dammit!" he said.

"HEY! LANGUAGE!" said Ted.

rolls eyes, mentally flips off

Meanwhile, El and Hopper stopped by McDonald's, a new favorite of El's. She typically avoided ordering a burger because it gave her painful flashbacks of Benny's and the bad men. Instead, she ordered chicken nuggets and fries with a Sprite. Hopper refused to let her go in, deeming that it was still not safe, and demanding that she stay in the car and let him order for her. She pouted until she got her hands on a happy meal, which she devoured all of on the way to Blockbuster. This time he let her go in and look around, as long as she wore his ugly, old, black hoodie over her head. She picked out the new Friday the 13th movie.

"Whatcha got there?" he asked.

hands movie

"Oh, no, no. What's our rule?"

"No R movies..."

"That's right. It's too violent. Now, put it back."

"Too violent?! Dad, I've literally killed people before...I mean, I'm not proud of it, and I'm not a killer, but still."

"Shhh...Jesus! Someone could hear you!"

"I'm sorry, you're right. Still, I don't see how this movie could possibly be any worse than anything I've already experienced."

"Yeah, well...Ah, fuck it. I'm tired of arguing with you. Get whatever the hell you want."

"Thanks, Daddy!" she said with a devious smile.

They purchased the movie and left to watch it.

"Popcorn?" he asked.

"Always!" she said with a smile.

She played the message on the machine. After it ended, the popcorn was ready and so was Hopper.

"You ready?"

"Yeah, I'll be there in a minute. Just gotta call Mike back real quick..."

"I get it, he's your boyfriend, he comes first...even before your old man. That's fine, that's fine."

"Oh, hush! You know that's not true. I love you both. *smiles*" she said while dialing.

rings

"Hello?"

"Mike!"

"El! Finally! I've been trying to reach you all day."

"Me too. *laughs*"

"So, like I said, it's all settled."

"That's good because I don't think I could go another week without seeing you."

"Me either...What've you been up to?"

"Nothing much. Just hung out with Eggo most of the day, and then my dad and I went to McDonald's and rented the new Friday the 13th movie."

"Aww, that's cool...Wait, what?! He let you rent Friday the 13th Part V: A New Beginning?"

"*laughs* Yes."

"My mom won't even let me rent that movie! The only time she's ever offered for me to rent an R-rated movie was when she still believed

that Will was dead and that I was grieving."

"Yeah, well, the only other time he's let me rent a scary movie was on Halloween, but that was just to make up for not going trick-or-treating, and he was late anyway."

"So, then how did you convince him this time?"

"Well, he said it was too violent for me, so I made the point that I had literally killed people before."

"Yep, that'll shut him up!"

"*giggles* Yep."

"Anyway..."

"*laughs* What about you?"

"What *about* me?"

"What've you been up to?"

"Oh...Um, nothing much. Just student body president stuff."

"You're not gonna tell me about it?! Why, is it like top secret or something?"

"*chuckles* No, nothing like that. It's just kind of boring, that's all. I figured you wouldn't be interested."

"Figured I wouldn't be interested? I *am* the one who helped you get elected, you know!"

"That you did," he said smiling and thinking back on the time that they painted campaign posters together.

"Well, I would actually like to hear about it at some point, but my dad's waiting on me to watch this movie, so I'll talk to you later if that's okay."

"Yeah, sure. Have fun! Goodnight, El."

"Goodnight, Mike."

hangs up

She spent the remainder of the night eating popcorn and watching the movie with her father. When it got too scary or would trigger memories, she would jump into his lap. He would then rub her back and kiss her head to comfort her.

[6 days later]

3:30 am: El eagerly wakes up Hopper. Both get ready to take her to school, but not without engorging waffles and contemplating over a cup of coffee first.

4:00 am: Hopper and El both leave the premises, with Hopper struggling to keep his eyes open the whole car ride.

4:30 am: El arrives at school, hops out of the car, and runs toward Mike. He catches her in a hug, with her leg in the air like Edith Shain. The bus, though supposed to take off at this time, gets a late start. The gang stands around and talks to each other during this period of waiting.

5:00 am: The bus gets running. Mike and El sit together in the very back of the bus. They converse for a bit, leading up to Mike giving El a history lesson about some of the landmarks and memorials that they would soon see.

5:30 am: El dozes off during Mike's lesson. He looks down at her and smiles, feeling the weight of her head fall against his shoulder. He kisses her head and strokes her hair, as she dreams of him.

6:00 am: Mike listens to one of The Police's albums on his walkman, El still sleeping.

6:30 am: Mike shushes the noisy kids on the bus while El snoozes the whole way. They take the exit to the nearest gas station and take a pit stop.

7:00 am: Mike wakes El up.

"*holds chin up with thumb* Wake up, Sleepy Head."

She let out a big yawn and hugged onto Mike. Then, she looked up at him and asked:

"Where are we?"

"At a gas station. We're taking a break."

"Oh...Okay."

"C'mon, let's get some snacks. They have just about everything in there!"

"Even eggos?!"

"No...I wish."

"Aww, man...Oh gosh, I miss Eggo."

"It's totally natural to get a little homesick. Don't think about it too much though, trust me."

"You're right. *takes a deep breath* Let's get some snacks."

He walked down the bus steps and as she came to the last steep step, she jumped off and he caught her in his arms. He then spun her around and lowered her to the ground, putting his arm around her as they walked into the gas station together.

"30 minutes!" the teacher yelled.

"Sweet!" Mike said.

They raided the candy aisle, with Mike picking the best and craziest candies for El to try. After paying for them, El grabbed Mike's hand and said:

"C'mon!"

"Where are we-Whoa!" he said as she pulled his hand away in mid-sentence.

She led him into the girls' bathroom and locked them both into the nearest stall with her mind.

"*whispers* El, what the hell are we doing here?"

"Why so tense, Mike? Are you scared?"

Not thinking twice, he looked her up and down and said:

"Um...Yeah, a little."

"Don't be. I don't bite."

She hadn't changed at all, but she never failed to surprise him either. Just when he thought she had gone soft, she was back and more badass than ever.

"*walking towards him, hands behind back* You know, ever since that party and that church service, I couldn't stop thinking about you. That hair, *touches hair* those eyes, *rubs corners of eyelids* that nose, *rubs nose with hers* those lips. *presses against wall, hands crawl up chest, kisses*"

"So, I guess you did like my cliché make out spot after all..."

"Guess I did."

kisses

7:30 am: Everybody hops back on the bus. El tries a Warhead for the first time. She puckers her lips and face, nearly spitting it out.

"Agh! What the fuck was that?"

"*laughs* They're called Warheads. They get sweeter as you suck on them."

"If you say so..."

8:00 am: Mike and El listen to music together. It begins to drizzle.

8:30 am: Drizzling turns to pouring rain. Mike and El snuggle as they watch the rain trail down the foggy bus window. Mike shows El that she can draw on it. She then draws a heart with "Mike + El Forever" in the inside.

9:00 am: Mike and Max switch seats.

Mike grabbed El's shoulder and said:

"Hey, I'll be right back. I wanna sit with Lucas for a bit, okay?"

"Okay," she said smiling.

He walked over to Lucas' seat and said:

"Scoot over, Zoomer. I need some time with my boy."

"Yeah, sure thing, Mrs. Sinclair."

Mike flips her off

He slid down next to Lucas and said:

"What's up?"

"Nothing much. *That* was really entertaining though!"

"Gee, thanks! I'm so glad that my embarrassment amuses you."

"You should be! *chuckles*"

"So...Do you wanna play Truth or Dare?"

"No, no way. Not after last time. I don't wanna end up kissing Dustin!"

"I would never dream of such a thing! I'm just really bored though...Trying to think of something to do."

"Me too...We could play D&D."

"And how do you suggest we do that?"

"Well, it doesn't have the actual character pieces, but I bought this mini chess board from the dollar store. *pulls out of pocket*"

"What the hell! Let's play!"

"That's the spirit!"

All four of the boys got together and played a speed round. When they yelled, everyone looked in their direction.

"What are they doing?" El asked Max.

"Who knows! Being a bunch of dorks?"

"What's a dork?"

"It's like someone who's really goofy and random, and gets really excited about the silliest and stupidest things that they like."

"Yep, that pretty much describes them. Mike's a total dork, but he's my dork. *blushes*"

"Awwwwwww. El, you're blushing!"

"I am?"

"Yes!"

smiles

9:30 am: Mike and Max switch seats again.

"Hey, you," said El.

"Hey, beautiful. *eskimo kisses*"

smiles and blushes

10:00 am: Mike and Eleven kiss, with Lucas and Max jokingly gagging in their direction and saying: "Eww, you guys are gross."

10:30 am: Lucas and Max kiss, this time with Mike and El criticizing them and saying: "Look who's talking!"

11:00 am: El asks what time it is. Mike says "11:00," and both look at each other and say I love you. This soon became their new tradition whenever the clock struck 11.

11:30 am: Mike and El share a bag of jelly beans, guessing which flavor they ate and then checking the back of the bag to confirm.

12:00 pm: All of the passengers take a poll on where to stop for lunch, with the overwhelming majority being Taco Bell.

12:30 pm: Everyone gets off the bus and into the line, with Mike and El in the very back. El, Max, and the boys sing the Taco Bell jingle:

"Bring home the works tonight," said El.

"Everything tastes so right," said Mike.

"Take a big beefy bite," said Lucas.

"Oh no, I am not doing this!" said Max.

"C'mon! Have a little fun!" said Lucas.

"*MADMAX, MADMAX, MADMAX!*" Dustin chanted.

"*huffs and sighs* *Something...*all the works tonight," said Max.

"Crunchy oh crispy light," said Dustin.

"Cheddar cheese golden bright!" said Will.

1:00 pm: Mike and El finally arrive at the front of the line and order tacos and a basket of nachos to share together.

1:30 pm: Everybody throws away their trash and hops back onto the bus.

2:00-3:30 pm: Mike and El read books that they brought with them.

4:00-6:00 pm: Mike and El doze off while reading.

6:30 pm: The kids arrive in D.C. and check into the hotel.

7:00-10:00 pm: All of the students stop by a couple of sites, and at 9:45, El is introduced to the White House for the first time.

10:30 pm: All of the kids pick their room partners. Lucas and Dustin stay together in a room with Mike and Will. El and Max unwillingly stay together in a room with the "Totally" girls.

11:00 pm: Eleven knocks on Mike's door and comes in to say goodnight.

knocks

answers

"Hey, is Mike around?"

"Yeah, he's just brushing his teeth." said Dustin.

"Oh okay. Thanks."

knocks on bathroom door

opens

"Hey."

With a mouthful of toothpaste, he nervously responded:

"Hey! Hold on just a sec."

She laughed as he spit out his toothpaste, wiped off his mouth, and rested his hands on her hips.

"What are you doing here?"

"Just wanted to say goodnight."

"Oh ok. *smiles* Do you want me to walk you back to your room?"

"Sure," she said with a smile.

"I'm gonna walk her back to her room, okay guys?"

"Alright," said Lucas.

He held her hand and led her back to her room, still in his Star Wars pajamas.

"So...This is your room?"

"Yep, this is my room."

"Good to know."

smiles

"I love you," said Mike.

"I love you too," said El, smiling and stroking his hair.

His eyes traveled to her lips and hers to his, then back to his eyes. They looked at each other with a sense that everything they ever wanted was right in front of them. That magnet, that magnet that always drew her to him was present in that very moment. It took her away like a feather in the wind. When she felt her nose brush past his, she closed her eyes, taking in his smell. Fresh and crisp, just the way she liked it. He too closed his eyes, his lips merely only an inch away from hers. Then that magnet, that same magnet, pulled him closer to her. The moment his lips hit hers, she felt alive, more alive than she had ever felt before. He lived for her touch, the feeling of her fingertips, soft to the touch, brushing past his cheek and caressing his neck. Her lips tasted of cherries, wild and addictive. They felt so close, both emotionally and physically. Both of his lips latched onto hers one last time. He knew that it was time for him to go, though he didn't want to. With a hand to her face, he brushed his palm and thumb past her cheek, letting go as his forehead leaned against hers. They both sighed. He grabbed her hands, slowly pulling away from her face. She looked into his eyes and said with a smile:

"Goodnight, Mike."

"Goodnight, El." said Mike, smiling.

He walked away, as she took in every bit of their blissful day together.

21. Everything's Waffle Without You

Hey y'all. I changed things up a bit~ This time, things aren't going badly for El, but rather for Mike...but there's no problem big enough that these two can't face together! Enjoy!

It was April 23, 1985. El had recently gotten back from the trip on the 16th, but it had been precisely a week since she had seen Mike. There was always something that got in the way, whether it was his presidential duties, his homework, his mom, or his best friend Will. She was already very limited as to what she could do, with her dad being as protective of her as he was. This time it wasn't just his mom that was getting in the way, it was both of his parents...and Max's brother.

El knew something was going on with him, but he wouldn't open up to her over the phone, so she took it upon herself to schedule their next date, but letting Mike pick where they wanted to go.

Steve dropped him off at her house that same day, but not without saying "Go get her, Tiger" first. Mike gave him a scrunched look on his face and then walked up the steps. He knocked his special knock to her and she opened up immediately.

"Hey, you! I missed you," she said, pulling him in for a hug.

"I missed you too," he said, hugging her longer than she was expecting.

She pulled away and looked him in the eyes for a split second that felt more like 50. She looked up as he tried to kiss her head. He stopped and she pulled him in for a kiss herself. He flipped her over on her back and they laid on the couch, snuggling for a while until Steve honked his horn outside.

"Oh shit! I forgot about Steve!" said Mike.

"You brought Steve?!" she said, laughing.

"Yeah...How else would I get here?"

"Your bike...?"

"Oh yeah, didn't think of that, but hold on, I gotta talk to Steve for a sec."

He ran out to the car and motioned for Steve to roll down the window. At the same time, El watched him from the house window, wondering what he was up to.

"Let's go, Wheeler! I'm hungry," he whined.

"How 'bout we take El to Waffle House? She's never been before."

"You're just now thinking of this?! Oh man, that does sound good though..."

"Okay great. So, you'll take us there?"

"Yeah, if you let me sit with you."

"What? No way!"

"I'm the one who's driving you little assholes there!"

Mike knew how to speak his language all too well.

"Yeah, but you don't really wanna be a third wheel, do you? I'm only thinking of you, Steve."

"Alright, you got me...But you owe me, little man."

"I think that hot waitress that works there will do the trick."

"Oh man, I almost forgot about her...Okay, yeah, I'm game."

"Great. Be right back," he said, peeling his arms off of the windowsill.

He went back inside and said:

"Okay, let's go."

"Where?"

"Somewhere you're going to love!...Do you trust me?"

"Of course."

"Then, c'mon! You don't wanna see a hangry Steve, it's not pretty!"

"What's hangry?"

"Oh, it's something Dustin made up. It's like when you get angry because you're really hungry."

"*laughs* He's really good at coming up with that stuff, isn't he?" she mentioned as she put on her sweater.

"Yeah, totally," he said as he held the door for her.

"*laughs* You sound like Kelly and Veronica!"

"Oh my god! You're *totally* right!"

laughs more

He came back with El and off they went!

When she wasn't looking, he had grabbed her blindfold. When they sat in the back together, he wrapped it around her head.

"Mike, what are you doing?"

"Making it interesting."

"If you say so..." she said, laughing.

"What kind of music do you like El?" asked Steve.

"Oh hi, Steve! Um...Anything's fine."

"Anything it is!" he said.

laughs

He blasted music the whole ride. At a stoplight, El was trying to find Mike's face.

"Wait, I can't feel you...Where are you?"

"Right here," he said, kissing her neck.

When he lifted his head, she trailed her fingers around the different parts of his face that she recognized. When her fingers hit his lips, she froze. He peeled her hands off his face and kissed her.

"Hey! Just because the music's loud, doesn't mean I can't still hear you, ya assholes!"

"*giggles* Sorry, Steve!" said El.

"Jesus, what does it take to get some peace and quiet around here?!"

"Um...Steve, this whole town's quiet. Your music's what's making it loud." Mike stated.

"Yeah, well, you're enjoying it aren't you?"

"Yeah, I guess."

"Exactly, then shut up about it, will ya!"

Mike looked at El, as she tried to hold in a laugh.

When they arrived, Mike guided El out of the car, saying:

"Steady, steady-"

"Like a ninja!" Steve finished.

"*cuts eyes* Really, Steve?"

snickers

When they got close to the building, enough so that El could clearly read the sign, Mike untied her blindfold.

"So...?"

She smiled and said:

"Bitchin'!"

Mike and Steve laugh

She turned around and said:

"Thank you."

"Oh yeah, su-"

She pulled him in for an unexpected hug.

"Oh...Okay," he said awkwardly, as he hugged her back and rubbed her back.

She turned to face the building and interlaced her fingers with his. She took a deep breath and walked in with him, not knowing what to expect from a Waffle House. She could only imagine!

They sat down in a booth, facing each other, while Mike laughed as he watched Steve pout and slump in a seat all to himself. He grabbed a toothpick from the counter where the forks and trashcan were, and popped it in his mouth, kicking his feet up on the table, as he anxiously waited for the hot waitress to take his order.

Instead, the hot waitress came to Mike and El's table and the old, ugly waitress came and took his order.

"Welcome to Waffle House! What can I get you today, sir?"

He ignored her as he stared at the lovely waitress, Stephanie.

"Sir?"

"*sighs* I'll have a grilled sausage egg & cheese biscuit with hash browns, and a soda."

"Coming right up...Ah, but get your feet off the table, son. This isn't *your* house, this is the Waffle House." she said, annoyed.

"Hehe, sorry, ma'am..." he said.

Meanwhile, Stephanie took Mike and El's orders.

"I'll have a waffle bowl of grits and a glass of water please."

"Alright, and you, sir?" Stephanie asked.

"I'll have the same as her."

"Alright. Let me take your menus for ya, there."

takes menus

"Thank you," El said with a smile.

She and Mike looked at each other, both of their heads leaning against their fists.

"So, how is Eggo?"

"Oh, she's good."

"I bet she missed you all that time you were gone in D.C.!"

"Of course she did!" she said jokingly.

"*giggles* You know, I love going on dates with you," he said with twinkling eyes, as he held her hand from under the table.

"Oh really, I didn't notice!" she said.

"But you don't know why."

"No, I don't. Why?"

"Because you never looked more alive than when you're out in public. You just glow."

"Really?"

"Yeah, really."

"*giggles* Would you quit looking at me like that?!" she said, playfully hitting him.

"Like what?"

"Like...Like you wanna suck face with me," she said laughing.

He busted out laughing, not expecting her to put it that way.

"I can't help it...You just look so pretty."

"Stop it!" she said, laughing.

"Do you not believe me? Because if you don't, I will stand up on this table and profess my love to you, right here, right now, Jane Hopper."

"No, no! Mike, *grabs sleeve* I believe you," she said, laughing.

"Alright...Your loss," he said as she let go.

She smiled at him, so thankful to have a boyfriend that understood her as well as and loved her as much as he did.

Meanwhile, the hot waitress was on her break by the time Steve had scarfed down his biscuit. He decided to take action.

"Here goes nothing," he said to himself, as he slicked back his luscious hair.

"I'm going in, Wheeler." he said, patting Mike's shoulder as he passed by their booth.

Mike looked at him like he was crazy, the same look that he gave Dustin at the Snow Ball when he asked Stacey if she wanted to dance.

"This is *not* going to end well..." Mike said as El laughed at the both of them.

He walked over to the waitress' booth and said:

"Sup?"

"Um...Nothing. Do you need something?"

"I think you know what I need..."

She looked at him like he was ridiculous. He then continued on.

"Ketchup. I need ketchup."

"Okay, well, it's right over there."

"Oh, right, right...*pauses* Excuse me," he said, leaving.

"Nice going, dufus," Mike said to Steve as he walked by.

"Yeah, yeah," he said as he grabbed the packet.

He sat back down with the waitress and spread the ketchup on his hash browns. She looked up at him with a weird expression on her face. As he finished them, he said:

"You know, this tastes about as good as you look in that uniform."

"Are you flirting with me, Harrington?"

"You know my name?"

"I hear things..." she said.

"Good things, I hope."

"Some good, some bad...I don't what to think yet though. I like to take my time when analyzing people."

"Oh, I know. I've noticed you."

"Oh really? So, you've been watching me now, have you?"

"Yeah, I have. I mean, no! What? Of course not." he said smiling.

"Haha, it's okay, Steve. Well, I have to say, talking to you has been much more exciting than working in this hellhole, but unfortunately, my break's up."

"Too bad...I was just getting to like you, Steph."

"Well, I get off work at 8. Why don't you pick me up then?"

"Really? *clears throat* I mean, yeah, yeah, totally."

"So, I guess I'll see you then..."

"Guess you will," he said as he smiled, walked away, and plopped back into his booth.

"Wow, he actually pulled that off! I'm surprised," said Mike.

"Me too," said El.

"How are the grits? You said you've never tried them before, right?"

"Yeah, no, they're delicious!"

"I'm glad. I think so too."

"Hey, Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"I can't shake this feeling that's something's going on with you...It's like you're hiding something or keeping a secret from me."

Her intentions were considerate, sweet and innocent, but his feelings were all too real. He dropped his head and cleared his throat, saying:

"I think my parents are going to get a divorce..."

"What? A divorce? Oh my god! Why do you think that?"

"They've been fighting a lot more lately and...I think my mom had an affair."

"What's an affair?"

"It's like when you cheat on your spouse or significant other with someone else."

"Oh...Oh wow, Mike. I'm so sorry! You poor thing!" she said, holding his hand that rested on the table.

"Thanks. *tears up* Yeah, it's just been really hard, juggling that and all of this student body stuff. I thought my family was perfect, and then all this shit went down, and now I'm questioning everything I

ever knew and-"

"Hey, it's okay. This isn't your fault, Mike. *sighs* Well, do you know who it is? Did she tell you?"

"I'm not sure, but *sighs* I think she cheated on my dad with Billy..."

"Billy...? As in Max's brother, Billy?!"

"Yeah, I-I think so."

"Wow...Wow."

"I know!"

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, he started cutting our hedges awhile ago, which is out of character for him to begin with...Max said that there was a two or three-week period where he was just gone a lot, and now someone else does our hedges. I had caught them flirting once before and I think that maybe they had a fling and then broke things off."

"Gosh, Mike. Are you the only one in your family who knows?"

"No...Nancy knew about it before me, and my Dad's totally clueless, but Holly doesn't know anything except that they're fighting all the time. *sheds tear*"

"Aww, Holly...This isn't fair to her...she shouldn't have to deal with this shit, and you shouldn't have to either."

"Yeah, I know..."

"Oh, Mike. You're shaking!...C'mere," she said, motioning him to her side of the booth.

She wiped his tears and stroked his hair, as his shoulder rested in the crook of her neck.

"Look at me," she said.

looks

"Everything's gonna alright, okay? You and I, we're in this together, and I will be with you...every step of the way," she said as she held his face in the palm of her hands.

nods

She hugged him as he tightly grabbed ahold of her shirt sleeve. Stephanie walked over to the booth to clear their dishes and mouthed to El:

"Is everything okay over here?"

She gave her a thumbs up and mouthed:

"He's fine."

He slowly pulled away, wiping his eyes.

"You good?" she asked.

"Yeah, I'm good," he said.

"Good," she said, coyly smiling.

"*takes deep breath* Now that that's out of my system, *chuckles* I have something to ask you."

"Yes?"

"You do this often? Make guys open up and cry their eyes out in a Waffle House?" he asked her jokingly.

"*laughs* What can I say, I guess we all need a little emotional poking and prodding every once in a while...Just, not like how I had it."

"Look who's wise!"

"Aww, stop it!" she said, throwing her hand forward.

"What do you say? You wanna arm wrestle?"

"Sure!"

He reached out to grab her hand, but pulled away to point and say:

"No powers."

"Dammit... *sighs* Fine," she said.

They struggled for about 10 seconds before she ultimately pinned his arm down...without her powers.

"Why are you so good at this? Ugh."

"You're better off with someone who keeps you on your toes." she said.

"That I am," he said.

She giggled and they both leaned in for a kiss.

"Yeah, yeah, we get it, you guys are cute! Now, can we get the fuck out of here, so I can come back here and pick up Steph without you two dorks killing my mojo?" said Steve.

"Geez, someone's cranky!" said El.

"Cranky and egotistical..." said Mike.

They each paid for their meals and left. Steve dropped Mike off at home first. El walked out with him and said goodnight.

"I love what you did with your hair by the way. It's cute, it's a good look for you," he said as he brushed his fingers through her wavy hair.

"Oh, thanks so much!" she said, touching it herself.

"No prob," he said, as they came to a stop.

She turned to him and said:

"If things get worse with your family, tell me."

"Okay, I will."

"Promise?" she said, smiling.

"I promise," he said, smiling.

"I love you, you know that?"

"I do, and I do too...love you, I mean," he said.

She leaned her forehead against his, laughing, as her hands slid up his chest and grabbed ahold of his collar. She then said:

"Take care, okay?"

"You too."

She leaned in and kissed him, her hair blowing in the breeze.

"Night, Mike."

"Night, El," he said, waving to her as she walked away.

She drove away with Steve, leaving her heart with Mike, as he left his own with her.

22. Wonderland Into My Arms

It was May 4, 1985. Mike had recently joined the local boy scouts group with Will, and both of them were in the process of packing for their first camping trip.

"Now, son, don't forget the trick I taught you to-" said Mr. Wheeler.

"I know, Dad, I know. You only told me like 3,000 times!" Mike said, rolling his eyes.

"Watch that attitude, mister! It could get you in trouble."

sighs

Though Jonathan was not the outdoorsy type, he sought out a leadership opportunity to become the junior assistant scoutmaster of the troop. He drove Mike and Will to the campsite a little early so that he could be present before the other kids arrived. On the way, the three of them bopped along to The Clash and The Talking Heads, when all of a sudden, Mike shouted out:

"STOP! PULL OVER!"

"What? Why?" said Jonathan.

"Just do it!" he said.

Jonathan pulled over, recognizing the house before him and realizing that it was El and Hopper's.

"Hey, wait a minute...Isn't this-?" asked Jonathan.

door slams

"Guess that answers my question," he said.

Will laughed at his brother as he watched Mike run to the front door. He knocked his special knock until she forcefully opened the door. She ran out to him in her pajamas and a blanket which she wore like a shawl, wondering why he had come over so early.

"Hey, what are you doing he-?" she asked.

She stopped mid-sentence, too distracted by Mike's heart eyes intensely staring into her own to even remember what she was trying to say. Suddenly, she felt his hands grab onto her hips, forcefully pulling her toward his body. She gasped with excitement and curiosity, not knowing what would happen next. She looked up at his eyes, then down at his lips as he leaned in and kissed her. She was tense, her hands clasped together and resting in between the both of them. The warmth of his lips against hers soon put her at ease and she loosened up a little bit, the blanket slipping off of her shoulders and falling to the ground. In between breaths, his right hand slid into her hair, tilting her head back as she placed one hand under his arm, the other clutching to his neckerchief.

His kiss was all she needed. She knew this was goodbye, but not forever. No, she knew better. She knew that their love was stronger than her own powers and that it could withstand any distance or period of separation. She let her mind cling onto this moment as she herself clung onto him. He too took in every bit of bliss he felt in that moment while it was still fresh in his mind, knowing that this would be the one moment that he would dwell on during the treacherous two days he had ahead of him. This was the one moment that made everything worth it. He wasn't afraid of leaving his house, he was afraid of leaving his home, and she was his home. His hands traveled to her neck and cheeks, caressing them, and sending chills up her spine. He broke away and looked at her, his palms still resting on her cheeks as she held his elbows in the palms of *her* hands.

"*strokes cheek* You're so beautiful..."

"*blushes, batts eyelashes* Thanks. *gulps* You look handsome in that uniform," she said, tugging on his neckerchief.

"*smiles* Thanks," he said, looking down at his uniform, then back at her.

sighs

"*sniffles* I hate leaving you. I know I'm only gonna be gone today and tomorrow, but I'm gonna miss you so fucking much," he said,

resting his forehead against hers.

She lifted his chin up, saying:

"*sniffles, shakes head, laughs* Tell me about it!"

Both in sync, they each pulled their faces toward each other for one last kiss. Their eyes were closed, each with one another's tears running down their cheeks. She slowly pulled away as he played with her hair, pressing her nose against his and letting her hand slide down his chest.

"*sniffles* I love you," she said.

"I love you too. *sniffles*" he said.

"Stay safe," she said.

He then grabbed her hand and said:

"You too. *kisses hand*"

She waved him goodbye as he walked away, now experiencing the same feeling he once felt when she left to close the gate.

"*opens door, shuts* Sorry, guys. We're pretty big on goodbyes..."

"Yeah, no kidding!" said Jonathan.

"Onwards and upwards!" Will chanted as Jonathan drove on.

Meanwhile, El walked back inside, sulking over Mike's absence. She walked through the door, with Eggo ready to greet her, whimpering and all. She picked her up and kissed her head, petting the spot between her ears. She sighed and made herself some actual eggos as she listened to music. Once they were ready, she sat down at the table, only to find that Hopper had left her two things. She looked at them, then rubbed her eyes to make sure that she wasn't dreaming. She wondered why she hadn't noticed them before. The first gift was wrapped in newspaper with a little note attached to it, that read:

OPEN THIS ONE FIRST!

Sorry, I'm such a lousy wrapper, kid...I know you hate being alone, especially under these circumstances. Thought you could use something like this to keep you occupied.

-Dad

P.S. The word "mad" means crazy in this book.

She laughed as she read his note. Then, she unraveled the poorly wrapped present.

"Alice's Adventures in Wonderland." she read, her finger passing by each and every letter.

Then, she proceeded to open the next gift, the new *Alice in Wonderland* movie which had come out that same year. This time, the note read:

Watch this AFTER you finish the book. I think you'll like it a lot.

Love,

Dad

She peeled off the wrapping once again to find the movie.

"Alice in Wonderland." she read.

Though tempted to just go ahead and watch the movie, she walked back to her room with the book in one arm and a dictionary in the other, in case she didn't know some of the words. Eggo followed her into her room and lied down on the bed with her, as she opened the book up to its first page.

When Mike, Will, and Jonathan arrived, they were greeted by Scoutmaster Murphy.

"Howdy, boys! Lovely day, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir!" said Will.

"You boys just sit tight while we wait on the others, okay?"

"Will do," said Mike.

They each sat down and split a PBJ sandwich as they waited.

The other boys came piling in, with only two missing from the group.

Scoutmaster Murphy inaudibly mumbled the two names as he scanned the list and circled them.

"Troy and James?"

"Yes, sir."

"Oh no, no, no! This can't be happening...not today!" said Mike.

"Troy-" Will said, skittishly.

"And James..." Mike chimed.

"Well! If it isn't Fairy and Frogface!" said Troy.

"I'm warning you, Troy...Fuck off."

"Ooh, someone's testy! Funny, considering-"

"Considering what?" Will said bitterly, already knowing what was coming next.

"Considering that you and Mike are homos."

"I got this one, Will," Mike whispered.

"Clearly you don't remember my *girlfriend*...You know, the one that made you wet yourself and broke your arm," he said.

"Ah, you mean the freak!"

"Yeah, the freak who kicked your ass!" he mumbled bitterly, tempted to pin him down.

"What did you just say, Wheeler?" said James.

"He said the freak who kicked your ass!" said Will.

Mike looked at Will, shocked by the confidence he exuded in that moment. All of a sudden, Troy pulled out his pocket knife, laughing as he threatened Will like he once did with Dustin.

"Knock it off!" said Will.

"Let him go, Troy! Look, I don't know who the fuck ever decided that they would trust you with a pocket knife, but we're gonna be spending a whole week together. We might as well not be at each other's throats the whole time. So, why don't you let go of my motherfucking friend and we'll be out of your hair."

"Geez, Wheeler! You're starting to scare me a little."

"I'm not messing around, Troy! Let. Go."

"Whatever...C'mon, James!" he said, letting go.

Mike rushed over to Will who was coughing.

"Will! Oh my god. Are you okay?"

"Y-Yeah, I'm fine. Thanks, Mike."

"Of course."

He gave him a pat on the back. Then, the boys went around in a circle and introduced themselves, playing a name game. Afterward, they began their hike to the campsite. Once they arrived, they searched for firewood and set up their tents. They ended the night with a campfire, where they went around and shared something that was weighing on them. Though Mike loathed Troy, he was able to sympathize for him after learning about his absent father.

In the middle of the campfire, Mike lied in saying:

"Nature calls! Be back in a sec."

Instead of going to the bathroom, he rushed over to his tent and pulled out his supercomm that he had snuck with him. Then, he began talking to El through it.

At the time that Mike was trying to get in touch with El, she was still on her bed, captivated by the mad adventures of Alice. She set the book down, as she missed Mike and felt that he missed her too. She wondered if he was trying to get in touch with her. So, she hopped off of her bed and jogged over to the living room, where she put on her blindfold and turned the channel to blank. She proceeded to walk through the void, where she found dear Mike Wheeler, whom she knew and loved, sitting there, whispering sweet nothings to her through his supercomm.

As he vented to her about Troy and James, she sat by his side and stroked his hair and face. Though he could not see her, he could still sense her presence and felt comfort in knowing that she was there.

"Don't worry about them, Mike," she whispered.

"Just take of yourself, okay? Don't stay up worrying about me all night or anything. Just know that I'll be thinking about you. Goodnight, my sweet Jane." he said.

"*blushes, smiles* Goodnight, love," she said.

She proceeded to finish the few chapters she had left of her book while Mike returned to the campfire, only to find that most of the other boys had already left...all except for Will, who waited for him.

"Hey! I saved you a s'more."

"Thanks."

"It's nothing."

"This is nice," said Mike.

"What is?"

"It's just so quiet and peaceful out here. It almost makes you forget that there's a whole 'nother world out there."

"You mean like The Upside Down?"

"What? No. I mean, that too, but when you're out here, it's almost like

the rest of the world doesn't exist, you know? *pauses, looks at Will concerningly* It's still on your mind, isn't it?"

"Yeah...*sighs* I mean, the Mind Flayer's out of me, but the thought of it still haunts me. *gulps, looks at Mike* I can't tell you what it's like to be connected to something that you fear."

"I guess I never really thought of it like that...That must've been so frustrating...and scary!"

"Yep."

awkward pause

"You didn't really take a bathroom break, did you?"

"How'd you know? Did you find my supercomm?"

"I didn't have to. I just know you. *pauses, looks at Mike* You miss her, don't you?"

"Yeah...a lot."

"You guys are so close. I'm really glad that you've found someone like that."

"I am too. I honestly thought that I was gonna die alone! *laughs*"

laughs

smiles

"*yawns* We should probably get some sleep. It's gonna be a long day tomorrow."

"You're right."

Mike and Will walked back to their tent and each got situated in their sleeping bags.

"Thank god that these flashlights don't flicker like they do back home! *turns off flashlight*" Mike joked.

"*laughs* Goodnight, Mike."

"Night, Will."

turns off flashlight

Back in Hawkins, as El was reading her book, she found that she was able to relate to Alice and the Mad Hatter a lot. Like Alice, she had fallen into another world, but rather than being full of wonder, it was filled with terrible, horrific things. On the other hand, she had once felt "mad" like the Mad Hatter. She never really knew if she was crazy or if all of this was justified because of the obstacles that she had faced throughout her life. A couple of quotes resonated with her heavily, such as:

"It's no use going back to yesterday, because I was a different person then."

"I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."

"I'm not strange, weird, off, nor crazy, my reality is just different from yours."

"I'm afraid I can't explain myself, sir. Because I am not myself, you see?"

Though she had planned on finishing the book before the night was over, she ended up dozing off. Whenever Mike was away, her trauma and anxiety were much worse. Because of this, these were typically the times when she would have the most nightmares.

She fell into a deep sleep. Once she was in a dream state, she started to notice some similarities to the book that she had just been reading. It began with her falling down a rabbit hole, like Alice, that led to what appeared to be The Upside Down. She kept on calling out for Mike, but he was nowhere to be found, for she was far away from home. First, she came in contact with a demogorgon, but it snatched her before she could use her powers against it. It bit off her hands, but was then randomly called away by a mysterious force. Her knees buckled beneath her and she screamed "no" as she had come to

realize what had just happened. She then came across two paths, one yellow and black-striped, the other plain and green. She chose the striped path but soon came to the realization that the colors of the stripes meant to take caution against the danger that she would soon face, that danger being The Shadow Monster. She was much weaker, now that she didn't have hands. She tried to kill it with her mind and stare alone, but it was beyond her capabilities, for it was far too big and far too evil. It reached a leg out to her and took away her voice. She had never felt so afraid. Now, she was not only weak but silent too, for she could not scream a single word. It was then that she faced her last and worst encounter: Papa. As she tried to run back through the rabbit hole, she began to shrink like Alice in the book. At this point, she was small enough for the giant Papa to catch with his hand, and that's precisely what he did.

When he snatched her, she let out a big gasp and woke up immediately. She hyperventilated briefly until she found that she was her normal size and still had her voice and hands. She then opened the drawer next to her and pulled out a picture of Mike. She always kept this picture by her bedside in case she needed to remind herself that she wasn't alone. Just seeing his face made her feel instantly calm. She took a deep breath and then walked out of her room, putting on a brave face.

"Morning, Dad. *rests hand on shoulder, kisses head*"

"Morning, Sunshine. *pats hand with opposite arm*"

"Sleep well?" she asked.

"Like a log. You?"

"Not so great."

"Why not?"

"Nightmare."

"Do you wanna talk about it?"

shakes head

"You sure?"

nods

"Alright then. *pauses* Oh, what do you think of that book so far?"

"I love it! Thanks for giving it to me."

"You're welcome, kid. How far did you get?"

"I only have a couple of chapters left."

"Wow...You really burned right through that thing, didn't you?"

"*chuckles* Yeah, I guess I did."

pauses

"Hey, Dad?"

"Yeah?"

"Can I have Max, Lucas, and Dustin over today?"

"Um...I'm not so sure that's a good ide- *pauses, sighs* Sure. Of course you can, kid."

"Thanks, Dad."

"No problem. Just don't do anything-"

"Stupid, I know."

After he left, she fed Eggo and then picked up from where she had left off in the book. Once she was finished, she called Max.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Mrs. Mayfield. This is El."

"Oh hey there, El! How are you doing?"

"I'm doing alright. How 'bout you?"

"Doing just fine. You want me to put Max on the phone?"

"Yes please."

"MAX, EL'S ON THE PHONE!" she yelled.

"Alright, here she is..." she said, handing the phone to Max.

"El?"

"Hey, Max."

"Hey. What's up?"

"Nothing much, but I was thinking maybe you and the boys and I could hang out today."

"Yeah, that sounds fun! I'll call Lucas and if they can't come, I'll just let you know."

"Okay. Tell them to bring a D&D board if they can."

"Will do! See you later."

"See ya."

hangs up

Once Max got in touch with Lucas, who then talked to Dustin through his supercomm, they all three started making their way toward El's house, Max by skateboard, and Lucas and Dustin on their bikes. It took them a little longer because of the big rainstorm outside. Dustin knocked "B" for boys and she immediately let them in. She then pulled them all in for a group hug and gave them some towels to dry off with.

"So, do you want to play now?" asked Lucas.

"Sure!" said El.

They each sat down at the dinner table and began playing, with Lucas taking over Mike's role as the Dungeon Master.

"Are you guys hungry?" asked El.

"Always," said Dustin.

"I could go for something," said Lucas.

"Yeah, me too," said Max.

"Alright. *gets up, searches through cabinets* Well, we have chips, popcorn, nuts, eggos... *laughs*" she said.

"Chips sound good. You got any Doritos?" asked Dustin.

"Yes."

"What about soda?" asked Lucas

"We have Pepsi. Is that okay?"

"That's perfect. *pauses* Here, let me help you," said Max.

El carried the bowl of chips out to the table while Max brought each of them a can of soda. They continued playing until it was time for them to leave. By the time they left, she decided to pop in the movie. Mike never told El what time he was coming home because he wanted to surprise her. Instead of knocking his own special knock on the door, he used Hopper's special knock, "Us", to fool her. Thinking that it was her own father, she didn't budge or pause the movie, but just merely opened the door for who she thought to be Hopper. He set his pack down by the doorframe, standing there and saying in his best Hopper voice:

"Hey, kid."

"Mike!" she shrieked, laughing at his accurate impersonation.

She paused for a moment, wondering *Have I gone mad?* She shook off the thought and ran over to him, with the movie still playing in the background, and jumped into his arms. She was now at his eye level. He then spun her around, saying:

"*smiles* I missed you," he said.

"I missed you too," she said, as she pulled away from his chest.

He paused, taking notice in the way that the moonlight shone across her face. Her eyes, however, were fixated onto something even more sparkly than the stars in the sky...his eyes. A look of confusion came across her face, as he hadn't said anything for almost an entire minute.

"Mike?"

"Huh? Yeah?"

"*laughs* You okay?"

"What? Yeah, yeah. I'm fine."

"Good. Kinda lost you there for a minute."

"Oh sorry. Just got a little distracted."

"By what?"

"You."

blushes, runs hands through hair

She could tell that he was uncomfortable, but she wasn't sure why. Then, she realized that it was probably because he was still standing there, holding her up. So, she closed and locked the door with her mind, and then levitated herself, making it so that he didn't have to hold her up any longer.

"Mike?" she said, wiping the blood away from her nose.

"Yes, El?"

"Kiss me."

He looked at the beautiful girl in his arms, knowing that she was all he needed. He tilted his face to the right of hers and moved in on her lips. The moment his soft cheek hit hers, he paused. She wondered why. Then, he tucked a strand of her hair behind her ear and let his

index finger slide down her face as his lips enclosed on hers. He then pulled away as he felt a drop of blood hit the edge of his top lip.

"Well, this is embarrassing..." she said, wiping the drop away from his lip.

"It doesn't have to be," he said, quickly pulling off his neckerchief and wiping the blood away from her nose, moving her hand away from his face in the process.

He then slid his fingers in between hers and said:

"You can let go now. I've got you."

"You sure?"

"Promise," he whispered in her ear.

Knowing that she trusted him more than anyone, she let go. He immediately caught her in his arms, as she let out a sigh of relief.

"Better?" he asked.

"Much!" she said, slowly closing her eyes.

He steadily walked her to her room as he held her tightly in his arms, kissing her repeatedly. Once he was at her bed, he came to a stop, lying her down on top of it. She slowly scooted back as he crawled toward her, both of them smiling in one another's direction. They then continued to exchange sweet kisses. As the sound of the movie playing in the background became more noticeable, he slowly pulled away, asking:

"Do you hear that sound?"

"Oh, it's just the movie I was watching."

"Which movie?"

"Alice in Wonderland."

"The new one?"

nods

"Cool! I never saw it went it was out in the theaters, but Will and Dustin said that it was really good."

"Yeah, it is! I just finished reading the book."

"Nice."

"Do you wanna watch it with me?" she asked.

"Sure!"

"C'mon," she said, grabbing his hand and pulling him up.

As they sat down on the couch, she gave the tv an intense stare and started to rewind the tape.

"W-What are you doing?"

"Going back to the beginning."

"Oh, no, no. You don't have to do that. I know the story."

"I know I don't, but I want to. I missed some parts of it anyway."

"Alright then."

They snuggled as they watched the movie together, sharing the bag of popcorn that El stuck in the microwave and heated up with her powers. Hopper walked in soon after, pulling El aside to talk to her.

"Can we please just finish the movie and then take him home?"

"That's not the way it works. You see, there's this thing called school, and he has it tomorrow."

She grunted and sighed, walking over to Mike and saying:

"Bad news. We have to take you home."

"That's okay."

When they arrived at his house, El walked him up to his doorstep.

"Well, I had a *wonderful* time!" she said, giggling.

"Haha, me too."

They both leaned in, with El stopping half way.

"He's watching, so- *kisses cheek* Goodnight, Mike."

"Night, El," he said, squeezing her hand and then letting go.

She then walked away, leaving trails of trauma behind her, finally feeling like herself.

23. Bee Mine

It was May 10, 1985. Once the school day was over, Mike approached Lucas, who was found pacing by the bike rack, anxiously looking at his watch and the door.

"You know if you stare at your watch harder, I'm sure it will change faster!" said Mike.

"Says the guy who called his girlfriend every day for a year!" Lucas said.

"353 Days." Mike corrected.

"*chuckles* Yeah, like that's any better! Stalker much?"

"More like romantic!"

"Whatever. Same difference..."

"You always give me so much crap about El and the way I talk about her, the way I act around her, but you realize you are literally exactly the same way when it comes to Max, right?"

"Am not!"

"Except, the difference is that while I'm awkward, I don't get nearly as flustered as you do."

"Flustered? What are you talking about? I don't get flustered."

"Huh, um, I beg to differ. Snow Ball, last year when you asked Max to dan-"

"Okay. Okay, I see where you're going with this, and it's not going to work."

"Oh, it's not, is it? 'Cause you sure look tense to me."

"What are you two buttheads bitching about now?" said Max, walking over to Lucas.

His eyes widened, not expecting for her to be there so soon.

"Uh, nothing...Nothing. *kisses* How are you?"

"Me? Oh, I'm totally tubular!" she said, as they both laughed.

"Ugh, gag me with a spoon," Mike muttered to himself.

"Hmm, tempting..." said Max.

"Gee, thanks," said Mike, laughing.

"C'mon, let's go," she said.

"Yeah, I'm getting tired of standing here," said Lucas.

"First one to the boathouse wins!" said Mike.

"Wins what exactly?" asked Lucas.

"Um...the losers have to buy the winner the best new comic book in the store."

"You're on, Wheeler!" said Max.

They each raced to the boathouse, with Max in the lead, and Mike and Lucas at a tie. When they came to a part on the trail where trees and bushes had grown over, they had to squeeze through what one would hardly consider an entrance. Max pushed through it first, without a problem, but soon found that Mike was stuck in the bush, calling for her and Lucas' help. Since Lucas was farther back, she knew she had to help him, though she wasn't entirely sure if she could trust him. As she circled back and set her bike aside, she said:

"*sighs* You better not be pulling my leg, Wheeler!"

"I'm not...This branch is! *sighs* It's caught in the hem of my shorts."

"Oh," she said, laughing as she helped him tug it out.

Once Mike was free, Max, now even more eager to win, sped past him, without knowing that Lucas was already ahead of both of them.

Lucas was the first to make it to the boathouse. It was about a minute or so later when Max and Mike finally showed up.

"MADMAX...Just the girl I was hoping to see!"

"Congrats, Stalker!" she said, annoyed.

"Don't act like you're not impressed," said Lucas.

"Oh, we are. Very. *kisses*" she said.

"I'm actually surprised that Mike didn't make it here first!" he said.

"Yeah, well, I kinda got stuck in a bush along the way...Go ahead. Laugh," he said, taking off his shoes and sitting down.

"I see. *chuckles* That's why you should take the shortcut next time! It's so much easier."

"I bet," he said, feeling foolish.

The three of them stayed there for a while, reminiscing about various things, leaning against the tree trunks as they knocked out some of their homework and watched the sun's reflection over the creek.

"Damn...It's already 6:00," said Mike, as he looked down at his watch.

"Shit, you serious?" said Max.

"Yeah, we should head back."

"You're right..." Lucas said, as he picked up his bike and walked it back to the trail.

As Mike got up onto his feet, he found himself in great pain.

"OWWW!"

"*sighs* What is it now, Wheeler?" asked Max.

"I think I just stepped on a bee."

"Ouch!" said Lucas.

"You're quite the damsel in distress today, aren't you?" Max continued.

"Not helping, Max!"

"Right, sorry...Uh, can you stand on it?"

"Why would I wanna stand on it again? It already stung me!"

"No, *chuckles* I meant your foot."

"Oh, I don't know...Yeah, I guess, just not well."

"Okay, do you think you could make it back to your house?" asked Lucas, concerned.

"Yeah, I think so."

"Okay, well, in that case, *unties bandana* you should probably wear shoes this time. *wraps around foot*"

"Yeah, no kidding," he said, laughing, as he slid his sandals on.

They each made their way back to their houses, with Mike falling behind and Max and Lucas slowing down every now and then so he could catch up to them. When they made it to Lucas' house, she said:

"Later, Wheeler. Hope your foot feels better!"

"Thanks, Zoomer. Later, Ranger."

"Till tomorrow, Paladin," Lucas said, winking.

He winked back and rode on home, where he ate dinner, hung out, and then read his sister, Holly, a bedtime story before they both drifted off to sleep.

The next day, he woke up and called El to see what she was up to.

"Hello?" she said.

"Hey, you."

"Hey!"

"How've you been?" he asked.

"Good, you?" she responded.

"Same."

"How's school going?" she asked.

"It's been good, I've just had a lot of projects lately."

pauses, then continues

"What about you? Whatcha doin' today?"

"Hanging out with you, I hope."

"Good answer. Tell me where and when and I'm yours!"

"My place, 12:30."

"See you then, sweet cheeks."

"*giggles* I love you."

"Love you too."

hangs up

Preparing for his date with the lovely El Hopper, he put on his new pinstripe, button-down shirt and his favorite pair of khaki bermuda shorts. With a single glance at himself in the bathroom mirror, he noticed a few new, light hairs on the corners of his upper lip.

"DAD?"

"YES, SON?"

"CAN YOU C'MERE?"

walks upstairs

knocks on bathroom door and opens it

"This better be important. What is it?" his dad asked.

"Look," he said, pointing to the apparent hairs on his face.

"Oh, son, it's nothing to worry about. Your facial hair's just starting to come in a little."

"But...I don't know how to shave."

"Here, let me show you."

Relating to people wasn't Mr. Wheeler's strong suit, but he enjoyed these moments he shared with his son, teaching him how to become a man, even though Mike was already more of a man than he would ever be.

When Mike was ready, he biked over to El's, struggling, due to the lingering pain of his bee sting from the day before. He walked up to the porch, expecting to have to knock to get El's attention, but there she was, waiting for him on the stair steps.

"Wasn't expecting for you to be outside, but here you are," he said, smiling.

"Here I am," she said, smiling.

He dropped his bike on the lawn and walked toward her as she rose to her feet. She reached a hand out to touch his face, tucking a lock of hair behind his ear, knowing this time she could because she was exactly where she was supposed to be. His hands glided from the sides of her hips to the small of her back, slowly pulling her toward him.

"Hi," he said softly.

"Hi." she said softly.

"I've missed you." he whispered in front of her lips.

"Me too." she whispered, wrapping her arms around the back of his

neck and looking into his eyes as his lips met hers.

Her body felt so light as if she was floating whenever he held her, then again, maybe she was floating. She couldn't really tell the difference. She felt so connected to Mike that nothing else around her really mattered.

For Mike, it was different. El was the twinkle in his eye, the spark in his simple, suburban life. She made every day feel like a new adventure. Kissing her didn't make him feel lighter, but enlightened rather. She was an angel, his guardian angel.

Mike felt something jab his backside and pulled away, turning his attention to behind him.

"What's wrong?" she asked, waiting for him to look at her once again.

He looked at her, then at the ground, and back at her eyes again.

"Nothing. The rocking chair just poked me, that's all," he said, chuckling.

"*laughs* Oh okay."

As she started to move back toward him, he raised his eyebrows and sat down in the rocking chair, motioning her and saying:

"C'mere."

She wrapped her arms around his neck again and climbed into his lap, folding her legs at his side.

"Wow..."

"What?" she said.

"Yellow...It looks really lovely on you," he said, as his hands grazed the sides of her skirt.

She always got shy whenever he said something sweet to her. He held her close, noticing how deep the dimples in her cheeks sunk in when he complimented her. He placed his index fingers in each one as he

brought his face to hers. He leaned in, stopping halfway, letting her come to him.

She licked her lips, moistening them slightly as the tip of her nose nuzzled into his soft cheek, her lips now latching onto his. With one hand on his chest, she could feel his heartbeat. It started out aggressive, then faded out, and came back again. It was so personal to her, feeling the power of such an important part of Mike, his heart. It made her feel safe, like Mike was someone she could always rely on because like the heartbeat, he always came back for her.

It was hot and muggy that day, humid from the rain that had poured just the day before. The sun was peaking out of the clouds. It almost seemed as though it was a sign that summer was near. Mike would stop and stare at the beautiful girl in front of him, taking notice to the way the sunlight hit her just perfectly, like a spotlight. As El got more comfortable, she leaned back and accidentally lost her grip. Luckily, Mike caught her just in time. He pulled her in such an embrace that caught her off guard, but in a good way. They both got so tickled over the incident, with El throwing her head back in laughter. As the laughter faded out, Mike laid a hand across her shoulder, looking into her eyes and saying:

"Hey. *lays hand* You sure you're okay?"

"I'm more than okay," she said.

They continued until El stopped, laying a hand on Mike's chest and saying:

"Hey, actually it's getting kind of hot..."

"Was it not hot before?"

"Oh, not that! No, it's always amazing! I was just saying that I'm hot right now."

raises eyebrows

"Mike, stop! *laughs* No, not like that- I mean, okay that too, *laughs, sighs* but I meant-"

"I know exactly what you meant..." he said.

"Mike Wheeler, you are a piece of work!"

"*laughs* I'm just messing with you. Sorry, what were you trying to say?" he said, as he listened intently, stroking her hair and tucking it behind her ears.

El paused in that moment. He was messing with her, so she wanted to play along. She cleared her throat and put on a British accent, saying:

"Farm Boy, it's positively dreadful out here with this sunlight hitting my back. Would you be so kind as to escort me inside?"

"As you wish," he responded, standing up and carrying her through the door.

Once she was back on her feet, she directed him to the kitchen, where she asked him:

"You hungry?"

"Starving," he said.

"Do you like Chinese food?"

"I love Chinese food."

"Good. I'll heat some up for you."

"Thanks, El," he said, pulling her hair to the side and kissing her neck from behind, as she put the leftovers in the microwave.

"You want me to play some music?" he asked.

"Sure! The record player's over there. *points*"

"Okay."

He walked over and pulled out a Billie Holiday album, lightly placing the cartridge against the vinyl.

"What is this? I don't think I've never heard this one."

"Trust me, it's really good. You're gonna love it."

Once it was ready, she brought them a big plate of spicy noodles to share.

"I'm terrible at using chopsticks," she said.

"Me too!" he admitted.

"Really?"

"Yeah, really. They're totally overrated."

"Haha, I agree."

"Wait, hypothetically, couldn't you just make the noodles float into your mouth?"

"*laughs* Yeah, I can. I've done it before, but my dad doesn't like me to."

"That's so cool!...Wait, why not?"

"He says it's rude."

"Yeah...Grown-ups are so fixated on table manners, but they're all posers. We all know that they do that shit too!"

"*laughs* Tell that to my dad!"

"I would, but then *my* dad would say it's rude!"

laughs

"Okay, I know you're not supposed to, but could you do it for me? Just once?"

"It's just a floating noodle, but sure!"

Sure enough, she stared down the plate of noodles, with Mike watching *her* closely. You could see the excitement on his face as the noodles landed into her mouth, one by one.

"Gnarly!" he said.

"Here, open your mouth," she said.

El continued to concentrate on the noodles as she floated them over to Mike.

"Extraordinary!" he said after finishing them.

"Extraordinary?"

"Yeah, like extra-ordinary."

"So, like better than normal?"

"Exactly. Not just better though, more like amazing!"

"You think *that's* amazing?"

"I mean yeah, that was pretty kickass!"

"Just wait 'til you see this..."

"See what?"

"This," she said, as she lifted another noodle in the air, pinching and shaping it into a heart.

"No. way."

smiles

"Man, if I could do that, I don't think I would ever get bored," he said.

chuckles

Once all of the noodles were gone, all there was left to look at was El, cute as a button. The combination of being with his lovely girlfriend while listening to such nostalgic, romantic music was too much for him to bare. He couldn't possibly sit a minute longer in that small, stiff chair. Everything inside him was saying *Ask her to dance, you fool!*

It seemed as though El was thinking the same thing. She hinted the same desire when she said:

"I'm glad you're here, and I'm also glad that you got this record out!"

"Me too. So, you do like it?"

"Yes, It's so...romantic."

He took the cloth napkin out of his lap, wiping his mouth as he stood up.

"Then I take it you wouldn't mind dancing right about now?"

"Mind? More like you read my mind!"

They held hands as they walked to the middle of the room. She lifted her right hand up, watching as his enclosed around it. She moved closer to him, letting her head fall onto his shoulder as she held onto it. There they were, cheek-to-cheek, lost in the music.

"You know, I'm kind of surprised that Hopper listens to this stuff."

"Really? Why?" she said, pulling back.

"I don't know, I guess I pictured him listening to older stuff, but not this old. More like '60s and '70s music."

"Oh, he does. How old is it though?"

"I'm pretty sure she was popular from the early '30s up until the late '50s when she died. Lucas' dad was watching a documentary on her one time when we were hanging out at his house and we kind of sat in and watched parts of it."

"I've never seen a documentary before. What are they like?"

"Um, well, they can be kind of boring sometimes, but it just depends on the movie. Sometimes they're really interesting."

"You should show me one sometime."

"I will."

long pause

"Hey, do you think Hopper listens to this with Ms. Byers?"

"I doubt it. He's a *terrible* dancer," she said, laughing.

The next song, *I'm Yours*, stuck out to Mike like a sore thumb and resonated with him strongly.

*Ask the sky above
And ask the earth below
Why I'm so in love
And why I love you so
Couldn't tell you, though I tried to
Just why I'm yours
When you went away
You left a glowing spark
Trying to be gay as
Whistling in the dark
I am only what you make me
Come take me
I'm yours*

*How happy
I would be to beg or borrow
For sorrow
With you?
Even though I knew
Tomorrow
You'd say we were through
If we drift apart
Then I'll be lost and alone
Though you use my heart
Just for a steppin' stone
How can I help dreaming of you?
I love you
I'm yours*

*How happy
I would be to beg or borrow
For sorrow*

*With you?
Even though I knew
Tomorrow
You'd say we were through
If we drift apart
Then I'll be lost and alone
Though you use my heart
Just for a steppin' stone
How can I help dreaming of you?
I love you
I'm yours*

"You know, it's true."

"What is?"

"All of these things that she's saying. That's how I feel about you."

"You really know how to please a girl, don't you, Mike Wheeler?"

"Not just any girl. My girl." he corrected.

She looked up into his eyes and felt nothing but love. Then, she let her forehead fall onto his as they mirrored each other, each with a toothy laugh, a wrinkled nose, and arms around each other's necks.

After they danced for what felt like hours, a thought occurred to El as she said:

"Oh shit."

"What's wrong?" he asked.

"I forgot to walk Eggo today! Ugh, my dad's gonna kill me."

"That's okay, we can walk her right now."

"You'd really do that for me?"

"Of course."

"Okay. I think I'd better change into something a little more casual."

I'd hate to get this dress dirty."

"Sounds good. I'll put the leash on her..."

"Thanks. Be back in a sec."

After she left the room, Mike called out for Eggo.

"Eggo? *whistles, pats thighs repeatedly* C'mere girl!"

Just waking up from a nap, Eggo came dawdling in with ears perked and all. She jumped with joy at the sight of Mike, someone who she didn't see all the time, but boy, did she enjoy his company when he was there!

He bent down to her level, petting her coat as she licked his face.

"You're ready for a walk, huh?" he said, looking at her as he held her face in his hands.

"Yep," El said as she walked into the room.

"Oh, I wasn't talking to y-I mean- Never mind."

"Okay..." she said, laughing as she linked arms with him and grabbed ahold of the leash.

They walked through the woods by her house. Mike was secretly in a lot of pain after dancing for so long and now walking. It was hard on the foot where the bee stung him. He would have her stop every now and then so he could take a break. She wondered why he was so out of shape, he wasn't normally. She thought it'd be better not to bring it up.

After they stopped a few times, she noticed that he was limping and finally confronted him about it. Laying a hand on his shoulder, she said:

"Mike?"

"Yeah?" he responded.

"Are you okay?"

"Yeah."

"Then why do you keep doing this?" she asked as she imitated his limp.

"Oh, it's nothing. My foot just hurts a little, that's all."

"Why does it hurt?"

"I accidentally stepped on a bee yesterday."

"That sounds like it *really* hurts."

"Yeah, pretty much. I think the stinger's still stuck inside it."

"Why didn't you say something earlier?"

"I just didn't want to get in the way. I didn't want to make a big deal out of it because I was having so much fun dancing with you."

"You kept this to yourself just because you wanted to be with me?"

"Well, yeah."

"Mike, that's so sweet, but I would've understood!"

"I just didn't want you to worry about me."

"Well, now I am worried and I don't want you to bottle up all of this pain any longer. *sighs* How 'bout we stop and I'll take the stinger out."

"How would you do that?"

She looked at him in such a way that told him she was talking about her powers.

"You mean with your powers?"

"Yeah, how else?"

"*sighs* I'm just afraid that it's going to hurt."

"I promise I'll be careful. You do trust me, don't you?"

"Of course I do."

"Then shut up and let me help you." she said, laughing.

"Okay, okay," he said, agreeing.

He removed his shoe, revealing his swollen, red foot.

"Oh my god. No offense, but is your foot normally this big?"

"*laughs* No, no, it's just swollen."

"Swollen?"

"Yeah, it happens when something irritates your skin and when it's filled with fluid underneath that causes the skin to swell, or expand in size."

"You poor thing...Alright, I'm gonna take it out now. Ready?"

"Ready."

She lowered her head and stared at the dreadful splinter with hate in her eyes. She was already upset that it happened to him in the first place, which helped her center her anger even more. She slowly lifted and removed the stinger from his foot, as his wincing in pain soon turned into sighing with relief.

"Ah. That's so much better! Thank you, El. Your powers sure do come in handy, don't they?" he said as he pulled her into a hug.

She hugged him back, secretly fearing that he might not love her the same way if she didn't have these powers handy.

Mike put his shoe back on and they walked the little distance they had back to the house, with his arm wrapped around her shoulder so that he didn't have to put weight on his swollen foot.

As they walked back, the thought of Mike possibly only loving her for

her powers haunted El. It was such an irrational thought, she felt silly even thinking about it, but the more she thought about it, the more it made sense to her. He noticed that she was unusually quiet most of the walk. El was a quiet person, but she talked to Mike more than she did with anyone.

"Hey, are you okay? You haven't said much since we started walking again?"

"Yeah, I'm fine," she said.

Mike was well aware that half of the time, *I'm fine* really meant *I'm not fine*, but he decided to drop it and give her some space, still wondering if she would open up to him about it later.

When they got home, they each sat down on the couch. Mike tried to kiss El, but she kept pulling away.

She felt so discouraged. Perhaps the person she had known all this time wasn't who she thought he was. After all, they did jump into things very quickly, something that she had never done before. Could Mike be more selfish than she thought? She wasn't sure. She knew that the Mike Wheeler she met two years before sure wasn't. He was anything but selfish! If anything, he was considerate. He showed this same concern for her as he did then by saying:

"El, something's bothering you, I can tell. What's going on?"

"Would you love me if I didn't have powers?"

"Of course I would! Are you kidding me? *looks at her with concern* Were you afraid that I wouldn't?"

"A little bit, yeah."

"Why?"

"I don't know. You just seem so fascinated by my powers."

"Well, I am, I mean, they're pretty amazing."

"Sometimes it just feels like things wouldn't be the same if I didn't

have them."

"You're right, they wouldn't, but that doesn't mean that we wouldn't."

"I guess that's true," she said, looking down.

"El?" he said, lifting her chin up.

"Yes?"

"I want you to listen to me very carefully. I didn't fall in love with your powers and I didn't fall for you *because* of your powers. I fell in love with the troubled girl behind them. Your powers, they're just a bonus. I love who you are more than anything else. You're a true, loyal friend and you tell off anyone who isn't one, you've saved me countless times, you're protective. Sometimes, I ask myself *How did she do it? How did get through those terrible years in the lab?*, and then I remember how incredibly strong you are. But you're not just strong, you have a beautiful soft side too. Without knowing how to have fun and laugh, you found your own way. You have a great sense of humor and when no one else understood what I was going through, *you* did. You knew on a whole another level because we had this instant connection somehow. When I first found you, I saw nothing but a strange, lost girl with a shaved head. By the end of the week, I had was crushing on you big time! You were all I could think about. I had never met anyone like you, and not because of your powers and your shaved head, because despite living in a lab for years on end, with absolutely no human contact, besides the bad men that kept you locked up in the first place, you depended on me and showed me kindness in a way that nobody ever had. With you, I didn't have to worry about coming across as too awkward. You wouldn't have been able to tell the difference because you yourself felt unsure about what you were doing. While other girls would've laughed in my face, you laughed at my jokes, stuck by my side through it all, and more importantly, reciprocated my feelings. I thought that no one could love a frog-faced, nerdy boy like myself, *chuckles* but you proved me wrong, time and time again. When you felt you looked your worst, you always looked your best. I remember, you used to be so insecure about the way you looked, and frankly, I never understood it because even though girls often are, and us guys play a big part in that unfortunately, I had just never seen someone look at themselves

in the mirror with such uncertainty, but you trusted me. You trusted me and you knew that when I told you that you were pretty and beautiful that I meant it, and I did, I really did. *strokes cheek* You're absolutely beautiful, and whether you think that you look exactly or don't look anything like everyone else, it doesn't matter because the way you look is perfectly imperfect. You are your own person, you always have been, and by being together, we have boosted each other's confidence in a way that we never thought we could. *grabs hands* At the end of the day, I just want you to know that I love you. I love you so much and I always will. If you ever feel uncertain about that, I will show you in every way I know how."

As she heard these words, these lovely things being said to her, she couldn't help but break down in tears.

"Oh, Mike! *sniffles* I love you so much! *hugs, then pulls away* That's the sweetest thing anybody's ever said to me... *puts hands on face* I want you to know that these past few months have meant everything to me. I couldn't have asked for anything better, I couldn't have had it any other way. You are the reason I have a father, the reason I have a home, the reason I'm alive at all! I just look into your eyes and I know that I'm exactly where I'm supposed to be. And I can't go a day without missing you. It's just not possible. Before you, I didn't know what love was. I was afraid. After you kissed me, it was all I knew. All I knew was that I wanted it with you and that's exactly where I found it, in your arms."

After exchanging these passionate, loving feelings that almost served as vows, they just held each other, knowing that everything was going to be okay as long as they were together. They were completely comfortable with each other, heart and soul, so much so that they could just stare at each other in the eyes without feeling timid. If anything, it felt right.

24. Some Have Food & Love

Hey guys! Hope you enjoy this chapter, I thought it would be cute. Btw, I just ordered the season 3 poster online the other day and I'm so excited! Can't wait to hang it up in my room and embrace the beauty that is Mileven. Anyway, feel free to leave comments as you please. Happy reading!

It was Sunday, May 12, 1985. In less than a month, Mike, Lucas, Max, Dustin, Will, and the rest of their 8th grade class would graduate. Mike really wanted El to be there not only for their friends but especially for his own sake. So, he got some invitations made for El, Hopper, and some of his other family. Then, he biked over to her house, slipped it under the door, and walked away. The mail had already come and El happened to be in the living room when he put it there, so she picked it up, forcefully opened the door, and walked out to see who it was.

"Hey!" she said.

"Oh, hey," he said, turning around.

"What's this?" she asked, holding it up.

"Open it!" he said eagerly.

She looked down at the envelope and smiled with curiosity, wondering what could possibly be inside.

"You are core-dee-uhlee-"

"Cordially," he corrected.

"...Cordially invited to attend the Hawkins Middle School 8th Grade Graduation," she continued, the excitement in her voice becoming more apparent as she read the last few words.

"I get to see you graduate?" she asked.

"Yep, you and Hopper. We're having dinner afterward too, which you're also invited to. You'll get to meet my grandparents, my aunts

and uncles, my cousins- Basically, my whole family will be there!"

"I'm sorry, did you say your *whole* family?" she asked.

"My *whole* family."

El was excited to get to know his relatives, but having dinner with his whole family was a lot of pressure...*What if they won't like me?* she thought.

"Wow..." she said.

"You seem a lot less excited than I thought you'd be..."

"Mike, I'd love to meet your family, it's just...I've never even really had dinner with your parents and sisters, if you don't count the time we had brunch at the Olive Garden."

"Well, maybe we can change that...How about you hop on this bike with me and join me and my family for dinner tonight?"

"Really?"

"Yeah, really!"

"Okay, I should probably change first though..."

"And I should probably call my mom before she murders me!"

"That too!" she said, giggling.

El raided her closet for a nice dress to wear to Mike's house as he used her phone to call his mom.

"Mom?"

"Hi, sweetie. Do you need something?"

"No, actually I was just calling to give you a heads up that El's coming over tonight for dinner."

"What in god's name are you talking about?"

"Well, you see, I dropped off the invitation like you asked, but she felt a little overwhelmed when I mentioned having dinner with our whole family, so I figured she should have dinner with us once before she meets the rest of our family."

"Well, that's very sweet of you, Michael, but the house isn't guest-ready and I haven't even started making dinner yet!"

"That's okay, I'll buy you some time."

"But Michael-"

"C'mon, Mom! Just this once, please, please do this for me."

"Fine, but I'm not doing this for you, I'm doing this for El."

"Fine by me."

"Make sure you take the long route home, mister. I need as much time as I can get!"

"You got it! Love you, Mom."

"Love you too. Bye, sweetie!"

hangs up

"HEY, MIKE? WILL YOU LEAVE MY DAD A NOTE WHILE YOU'RE AT IT?" El yelled from her room.

"SURE," he yelled back.

Once he finished writing Hopper a note, he walked over to El's bedroom door and leaned his left hand against the frame, knocking on the door with his right, and saying:

"How's it coming in there? You almost done?"

"Yeah, almost done," she said, putting the dress over her head.

She then opened the door with her mind. He walked in only to find her undressed and facing him, with the dress sleeves hanging limply from her shoulders as the four buttons connecting the waistband

together on the front of her dress buttoned themselves closed all at once and within a second, something he found to be *extremely* sexy! She then flipped her hair out, her skirt spinning with her as she turned to face him.

It was a cute little green and white Melissa Jane dress. It had a willow floral print and a large peter pan collar that made it look like a sailor dress.

"What do you think?" she asked.

"Damn, you look good!" he said, frozen in place.

"You're such a dork," she said, shaking her head in laughter.

She walked out the door and passed by him, his eyes following her everywhere she went without actually having moved a single step.

"C'mon!" she said, dragging him by the wrist and interlacing her fingers with his.

They hopped on the bike, taking the long route home and stopping by Melvald's to pick up flowers for the table along the way. Meanwhile, Nancy was back at home, about to leave for her date with Jonathan...that was until Mrs. Wheeler caught her.

"Where do you think you're going?"

"To see Jonathan..."

"Not tonight, sweetie. El's coming over for dinner and we're all going to be here. Besides, I need all the help I can get!"

"Fine, then can Jonathan come too?"

"I'm afraid not, sweetie. This is El's first dinner with us, family only."

"But Jonathan is family!"

"You know what I meant. Mike was nice enough to not invite El when you had Jonathan over for dinner, the same applies to you."

"I made plans with Jonathan days ago and now you're telling me I have to cancel them just because Mike and his little girlfriend want to have dinner here? This is such bullshit!"

"I don't want to hear it, Nancy! Now, call Jonathan and help me clean the house before they get here."

"Ughhhh!"

dials phone

"Hey, it's me."

"Hey! Are you about to leave?"

"No...My mom's being a total bitch! She's making me clean the house and stay for dinner with Mike and El. So, I guess we're going to have to have that date another day..."

"Not necessarily..."

"What do you mean?"

"Well, you guys eat at like 7:00, right?"

"Yeah..."

"Then we'll still have plenty of time!"

"Plenty of time to do what?"

"It," he said.

"It?" she asked, still confused.

"*gasps* OH! You mean-"

"*laughs* Yes!" he said.

"I like how you think..." she said flirtatiously.

"Just call me once El leaves or when you have a moment away from your nuclear family and I'll sneak in your window."

"What has gotten into you? You're like a whole different Jonathan!"

"Love makes you crazy, sweetheart," he said, referring to her conversation with Flo that she had told him about.

"I love you so much..." she said, chuckling.

"Love you too, Nance."

"NANCY! LESS TALKING, MORE CLEANING!" Mrs. Wheeler yelled.

"*rolls eyes* Guess I'd better go then..."

"Guess I'll see you later then..."

"Guess you will..."

"Bye, Nancy."

"Bye, Jonathan."

hangs up

Nancy then got right to work, picking up around the house a little, vacuuming, and cleaning the bathrooms. Meanwhile, Mrs. Wheeler was fixing some lobster ravioli and warm goat cheese salad for dinner and Ted was home just in time to do...well, nothing!

"Nancy, go change, please," said Mrs. Wheeler.

"I have to change too?!"

"Don't make a big deal about it, just go put on a dress, a skirt, whatever you fancy!"

"Oh, and help your sister get changed too!" she added.

As Nancy and Holly each picked out something to wear, Mike and El made it home.

"HI, MOM. WE'RE HOME!"

She walked out of the kitchen wearing a nice dress with an apron

over it, saying:

"El, it is so good to see you again! Are you and your father doing well?"

"Hi, Mrs. Wheeler! Yes, we're doing great, thank you."

"Glad to hear it. Well, don't you look nice!" she said, admiring her dress.

"Believe me, I know!" said Mike, showing her off.

"Actually, I was just about to change into something nicer. El, you wanna come with?" he asked.

"Sure," she said.

"Alright, you two. Dinner will be ready in about 10 minutes, so hurry on down!"

"Will do," he said.

They ran up the stairs, racing against each other to see who would get there first- El won.

"You wanna help me pick out something to wear?"

"Yes!" she said eagerly.

She then walked over to his dresser and rummaged through the stacks of his shirts until she found the one that she liked best. She came across a short-sleeve, orange and white pinstripe dress shirt and pulled it out of the pile, holding it under his chin to see how she thought it would look on him.

"That one?" he asked, surprised by her choice.

"Yeah, I think the orange will look really good on you."

"Orange it is then!" he said.

He set it down on his bed and then picked out a pair of khakis and dress shoes to wear with it. He had her turn around when he changed

pants, but let her watch when he took off his shirt. He then walked over to his bed to pick up the shirt, but she had already picked it up before he could, so she hugged him from behind and kissed his neck as she slid each of his arms through the sleeves. His eyes widened and he turned around to look at her, smiling. He buttoned his shirt almost all the way up, but she soon took over once he was at the last two or three buttons. After buttoning the last one, she pulled him closer by the shirt collar, her head leaning to the right of his face as she kissed him. Once his hands were on the sides of her shoulders, she let go of his collar and placed her hands on the sides of his neck. Then, he briefly broke away, now leaning his face to the left of hers, with his right arm wrapped around her neck and his left around her back as her hands slid down his chest, her left hooking underneath his right arm, and her right around his neck, creating a tight hug between the two as they kissed. They each pulled away smiling after that, feeling so comfortable in each other's arms that they had a hard time letting go.

"I love you," she said sincerely.

"El, I'm so in love with you that I can't even think straight right now," he said.

"I'm so in love with you to the point that you're all I think about."

"I'm so in love with you that I can't even imagine my life without you anymore."

"I'm so in love with you that when I'm with you, everything else just disappears."

"I'm so in love with you that I've run out of ways to tell you how much I'm in love with you!"

"This isn't over!" she said jokingly as they walked down the stairs, with her hand around his waist and his arm around her.

First, they woke up Ted, who had passed out on his Lay-Z-Boy.

"*shakes lightly* Dad, it's time."

"What's that now?" he asked groggily.

"Dinner's ready."

"Alright...Oh, hey, El! Didn't see ya there," he said.

"*chuckles* Hey, Mr. Wheeler."

They then followed the trail of smells into the kitchen, where Holly was happily waiting for them.

"El!" she said excitedly, her head bobbing up and down as she ran toward the both of them.

"Hey, Holly!" El said sweetly, crouching down and catching her in a hug.

"Will you sit next to me? Pleeeeease..."

"Sure, I mean, if that's okay...Mike?"

"Go ahead! I'll just sit on the other side of you."

nods and smiles

"Mike, would you put Holly in her high chair?"

"Sure, Mom."

"Ush, there you go," he said, placing her in the seat by the end of the table.

As El walked over to the chair beside Holly's to sit down, Mrs. Wheeler eyed Mike and cleared her throat, pointing in El's direction with her eyes, and indicating that he should pull her chair out for her like a gentleman.

"Oh! Here, let me get that for you..." he said, rushing over by her side and pulling her chair out as she sat down, then pushing it under the table.

"Thanks."

Nancy then sat across from El, with Mr. Wheeler next to her, and Mrs. Wheeler on the other end of the table between Mike and his

father.

"And what do we have here?" asked Ted, with his tongue sticking out and a fork and knife in each hand.

"Well, I made some warm goat cheese salad just in case El didn't like the lobster ravioli."

"Aww, you didn't have to do that!" she said.

"Oh, I wanted to! Mike's just always talking about how great you are and it was the least I could do," she said, flailing her cloth napkin as she spoke before putting it in her lap.

He blushed as his mom mentioned him talking about El a lot. She noticed this and hooked her right arm around his left, rubbing it up and down with her other hand and leaning her head against his shoulder for a brief second to let him know that she found it flattering. She then said:

"It looks delicious, Mrs. Wheeler."

"Yeah, it really does, Mom," said Nancy.

"Why thank you, girls."

"Alright, enough admiring the food, let's get eatin'!" Ted said impatiently.

"Well, if I had known that you were going to be this impatient and rude, then I wouldn't have put as much on your plate!" Karen scoffed.

"I can't help that I'm hungry!"

"I've done nothing but slave away today, trying to make a nice dinner for Mike and his girlfriend. The least you could do is lead the blessing, Ted."

"It's okay, Mom, I'll do it," said Mike.

"Really?" she asked, surprised.

"Yeah, I've got a good one in mind."

"Then, by all means, go ahead!"

Everyone grabbed hands, Mike hooking arms with El and interlacing her fingers with his own.

"Let us pray. *pauses and bows head* Some have food but have no love, some have love but have no food. We thank you God for giving us both. Keep us mindful and responsive to the needs of others. In your holy name we pray. Amen," he said, squeezing her hand once he had finished speaking.

"Mike, that was lovely!" she said, impressed.

"It really was!" said Mrs. Wheeler.

"Where'd you hear that one, son?" asked Ted.

"Nowhere, I made it up."

"You're so full of shit..."

"Nancy!" Mrs. Wheeler said.

"LANGUAGE!" said Ted.

Nancy rolls eyes

"No, really, I came up with it myself. I-It just felt like the right thing to say while I'm surrounded by all of the people that I love," he said, turning to El once he said 'love.'

She shyly looked down and blushed, then looked back at him and that serious look in his eyes and smiled.

After that, Ted's wish finally came true and they all began eating!

"Oh wow, this is great, Mom!" said Mike.

"Thanks, sweetie," she said.

"So, El, how's that little dog of yours? Oh, what's its name now...?"

she continued.

"Eggo."

"Eggo! *laughs* Oh, that's right."

"She's doing great, thanks for asking."

"Aww, that's good."

El got silent after that, pushing the salad around her plate with her fork as she came up with different conversation starters, playing out the various scenarios and their outcomes in her head. She jumped a little when she felt Mike's cold hand squeeze her shoulder, asking if she was okay.

"Huh?...Oh, yeah, sorry. I was just daydreaming a little, that's all."

"It always gets the best of us," Nancy teased.

"Haha, right," she said.

"So, Nancy, Mike tells me you're looking at colleges right now. Is that true?" she continued.

Mike looked at her, surprised at how social she was tonight, but it was the good kind of surprised.

"Yes, I am! I've visited a few of them, mostly local, like Notre Dame, Purdue, and Indiana University, but I'm still keeping my options open. I'm actually interested in looking into NYU...That's kind of Jonathan's dream school."

"This is the first I'm hearing of this!" said Mrs. Wheeler.

"I was going to tell you, Mom, really, I was, but I guess I just chickened out because I didn't think you'd be too crazy about the idea of me being so far away from home."

"Sweetie, I told you, you can talk to me, remember? You can *talk* to me!"

"You're right. I don't know what I was so worried about! I'm sorry."

"That's okay, sweetie."

"Don't leave, Nancy! I'll miss you..." said Holly.

"Aww, Holly! I'm going to miss you too, but don't worry, I'll still visit."

"Promise?"

"Promise."

Mike and El locked eyes in that moment and smiled lovingly at each other. The word 'promise' had a lot of meaning for them, it was like a little quirk of theirs, an inside joke, a little secret that only they knew, and they liked knowing that.

"You know, I don't think I've ever asked you, but what do you think you want to study?" asked Mike.

"I'm not entirely sure yet, I have a lot of different interests, but this past year *sighs* with everything that happened to me, to you, to El, to Barb-to all of us really, it just got me thinking about what I could do to make a change. What could *I* do to protect my family and my town? So, with that, I think I might want to study criminal justice or law because I spent all of that time trying to put the pieces of the puzzle together and I want justice."

"Wow," said Mike.

"Ted, you're awfully quiet over there. Do you have anything to say to your daughter?" Karen asked.

"Like what?" he asked.

Karen scoffs

"I'm not a mind reader, what do you want me to say?" he continued.

"Forget it. *sighs* Well, Nancy, that's awfully ambitious of you," she said skeptically.

"Yeah, I know, it sounds crazy, but it just feels right. Other than that, I'm interested in ya know, girl stuff like maybe fashion. That'll probably be my backup plan."

"Of course!" Mike said, judgmentally.

"What's wrong with fashion?" asked El.

"Oh, nothing! Nothing," he said skittishly.

"I think you'd be good at that, Nance, working in law or criminal justice I mean. You certainly have a knack for that kind of thing," he continued.

"Thank you! See, Mom, he gets it!"

"Well, whatever you end up doing, I'm sure you'll be good at it and I'm glad to see that you're so passionate about something!"

"Thanks, Mom."

"You're welcome, sweetie."

"You know, Nancy, I could probably set something up with you and my dad if you want..." El offered.

"Seriously? You'd do that for me?"

"Of course! You're Mike's sister, which means you're family."

"Aww, c'mere, I wanna give you a big hug!"

"Okay," she said happily.

hugs

"Did you enjoy your salad, Ted?" Karen asked, annoyed with how little social interaction he was having with the rest of them.

"Yes, I did. It was really good, honey."

"Good. Well, I'll get the lobster ravioli then."

"Oh, let me get that for you," he said, feeling guilty for the way he had been acting and stepping up to the plate.

"Thanks, hon," she said, surprised by his sudden chivalrous behavior. Perhaps Mike's manners rubbed off on him!

"So, El, will you be joining Mike next year at Hawkins High?"

"Yes, I will," she said with a big smile.

"Oh, this is so exciting! I know Mike's thrilled."

"You have no idea..." he said, reaching his hand behind her head and running his fingers through her hair.

"Well, on that note, let's dig in," Ted said, setting the lobster ravioli on the table, then sitting down himself.

"Wow, this looks amazing, Mom," said Mike.

"Thanks! I hope that it tastes good too."

Now with the thought of high school on her mind, El asked:

"So, what is high school like, Nancy?"

"Complicated! *chuckles* The workload is heavy, but it's not so bad the first two years, so enjoy it while you can. It's really cliquy, but if there's anything I've learned about high school, it's that you shouldn't worry about what other people think of you or about trying to be someone that you're not."

"Cliquy?" she asked.

"Yeah, cliques are like different social groups that hang out with each other and don't typically interact with other groups. Some are more popular than others, while other cliques are looked down on, but as long as you remember that you don't need anyone else's approval but your own, then you'll be fine."

"How long is school?"

"About 6-7 hours, but you might stay after school for a club meeting or tutoring."

"That's a LONG time!"

"You'll get used to it," she said.

"Don't worry, El! We'll be there to hang out with you and help you if you need it. We'll sit at lunch together and have study dates- It'll be fun!" said Mike.

"I could get used to *that*..."

"Nancy, do you still have your school handbook?" Karen asked.

"I think so, why?"

"You should give it to El, or at least let her borrow it. It might give her a better idea of how things work when you're in high school."

Mike could see it already, El, running towards him with a backpack on, holding hands in the hallway, stopping to push her up against a locker and kiss her in front of everybody. He imagined that she would be really shy in class, never raising her hand to answer a question, yet really talkative whenever she was around him and possibly even getting the both of them in trouble for it. He could see her leaning over and asking for his help with an assignment, wondering if he would tutor her after school. He could see her hating gym class, sitting out and watching Max play basketball, who of course couldn't love a class any more than she did gym. He could see her searching around the lunchroom for him and their friends but getting pulled over to the popular table. She would then learn where she stood. She'd either be the butt of their jokes, a pawn in their game, or someone they actually wanted to be friends with. Hopefully, she could teach them that life's about more than all of this clique nonsense, that it doesn't matter who you hang out with, it just matters who you are. If they made fun of him, she wouldn't chime in even if she did want to be popular. El was different from the other girls. She would stand up to them and defend him. He had so many hopes for her. He hoped that she would really find herself, that she would find what she was passionate about besides Mike himself. He

didn't want her to stop hanging out with him and his friends, but he still wanted her to make new friends. He wanted her to not be afraid to ask questions. He wanted her to learn how to cope when things got tough. He wanted her to learn how to be proud of herself without boasting about it to everyone she knew. He wanted her to learn how to be independent. He wanted her to have a good time.

"You know, El, maybe you could shadow Nancy for a day..." Ted suggested.

"That's actually not a bad idea!" said Karen.

"I can't tell whether that's supposed to be a compliment or an insult to the rest of my ideas."

"*rolls eyes* It's a compliment."

"Well, in that case, thank you," he said, looking at her flirtatiously.

"It'd be a little late in the year for someone to shadow you, but I think it would still give El a good idea of what a typical day in high school's like."

"Shadow?" she nervously asked, associating the word with the mind flayer.

"It means that you would follow me around during the school day and sit in on each of my classes."

"Oh, I get it, because your shadow follows you wherever you go, right?"

"Exactly!" she said.

"I think that'd be good for you," said Mike.

"You do?" she asked, turning to him.

"Yeah! I mean, you'd still have to do assignments, but a change of scenery might be nice, don't you think?"

"Yeah, it really would."

"Maybe I could shadow Jonathan too. That way, you'll get to see what high school's like when you're surrounded by your actual friends, or in this case, me."

"I love that idea."

"Mom?" asked Mike.

"It's fine with me if it's fine with Jim."

"Why do you kids always ask your mother for permission and not me?" Ted murmured to Nancy.

Nancy thought to herself: *Because you aren't a people person and don't give a shit about anything.*

"I see where you get your irritability from," El whispered to Mike.

"Hey!" he said, playfully hitting her shoulder.

"See!" she said, pointing it out.

"Either that or I've been spending way too much time with Lucas and Max!"

"That's so true!" she said, covering her mouth in laughter.

"Who's ready for dessert?" asked Karen.

"I am, I am, I am!" Holly exclaimed.

"Is that peanut butter and chocolate I smell?" asked Mike.

"It sure is! It's a trifle."

"What's a trifle?" asked Holly.

"It's like a sponge cake with three different layers. This one has chocolate, peanut butter, and vanilla pudding in it."

"Mike," said El.

"Yeah?"

"Pudding! Remember?" she asked with a laugh.

"Oh, I remember it very well," he said.

"You were so fidgety! *giggles* It was adorable."

"So were you!"

"Only because I didn't know how to kiss!"

"Neither did I!"

"It sure seemed like you did..."

"Let's see...It went a little something like this, right?" he asked, sliding his arm onto the table as he leaned in to kiss her, just like the first time. The only difference was that this time she kissed him back.

"Y-yeah, yeah, just like that," she said, breathlessly and flustered, feeling the same butterflies in her stomach as she did the first time they kissed.

"You guys are gross..." said Nancy.

"Human anatomy, Nancy, *human* anatomy..." he said, implying that she was being sexual with Jonathan.

"Bite me, buttmunch!"

"Alright, cut it out, you two! Why don't you replace that bitter taste in both of your mouths with some of this trifle."

Mike rolls eyes

They all began eating their dessert with an echoing of mmm's as their forks entered their mouths. Things got really quiet, as they were too caught up in its deliciousness, that was until they heard a knock on the door.

"I'll get it," said Karen, wiping the corner of her mouth with her napkin before getting up.

opens door

"Evening, Jim!"

"Hey, Karen. I just came to pick up my daughter."

"Oh, of course! Please, come in."

"Thank you."

"Hey, kiddo. Time to go."

"Already?" she asked with a mouthful of trifle.

"*chuckles* Yeah, I'm afraid so."

"Wait a minute, Jim. Why don't you stay for a bit and have some dessert? I made a trifle!" said Karen.

"Oh, that's awfully nice of you, but I probably shouldn't. I'm on a diet."

"C'mon, Dad, a couple of bites won't hurt," said El.

"*sighs* Screw it! I'd love some."

"Wonderful!" she said, handing him a chair.

He set the chair in between Mike and El, right where he could see them.

"Well, this is nice, isn't it? *looks at both of them* Quality time."

"My thoughts exactly," Mike said sarcastically, annoyed by the fact that he was blocking El.

"He's a funny one, this guy," he said, punching his shoulder.

Mike mouths 'Ouch'

Karen then passed Hopper a plate.

"Mmm! This is much better than the eggo extravaganza that we make at home."

As time passed by, El brought up Nancy's interest in pursuing law enforcement as a career.

"Is that right?"

"Yes. Do you think...maybe I could intern for you this summer or something?" asked Nancy.

"I think we can work something out. We could always use some extra help."

"So, is that a yes?"

"Yes."

"Great! Thank you so much!"

pauses

"You know, as a thank you for giving me this internship, I'd be happy to have El shadow me at school. I could give her a tour and everything."

"Really? You'd do that?"

"You scratch my back, I scratch yours," she said.

"I have a feeling we're going to get along just fine."

Before leaving, El and Hopper thanked Mrs. Wheeler for a lovely dinner. As Hopper got the car started, Mike walked El out to the porch, where she pulled him in for a long, swaying hug. They both slowly pulled away from one another's shoulders, but El stopped and just looked at him, her arms still wrapped around his neck. He managed to mutter out the words 'Goodnight, love,' but when he noticed El's eyes traveling to his lips, he could barely get a word out. She leaned back into him and kissed him tenderly, her hands gently pressing against the sides of his face. He held her by the small of her back, her skirt riding up a little as his hands moved around her lower back and waist. With one last kiss, El clutched his hair, her hand slowly grazing the back of his neck as they both let go. He then straightened her skirt out and tucked a stray hair behind her hair as

she said:

"Goodnight, Mike. I love you."

"I love you too, El. More than anything!" he said, kissing her hand.

And with that, she walked away smiling and holding his hand as long as possible.

25. Eleven Minutes In Heaven

Hey guys! I was hoping to post a new chapter before midnight on Valentine's Day to give y'all a little summ'n summ'n to hold on to, but unfortunately I failed to do so because junior year sucks ass. I stayed up so late the night before and was fried because I had three back-to-back tests/quizzes all on Valentine's Day, which is already the most lonely day of the year if you're a chronic single pringle like me, but that's beside the point. The point is, I figured if you're still in your V-Day feels, it wouldn't make that much of a difference if I posted it two days later. 🤔 Anyway, hope you like enjoy this chapter where they shadow Jonathan and Nancy at Hawkins High. Thanks for reading! Enjoy! ✌️

P.S. Fret not! I have lots of new chapter ideas I've been playing around with and writing back and forth, so stay tuned...

[Monday, May 13, 1985, 8:35 a.m.]

It was only 20 minutes until Mike and El's first classes at Hawkins High. Mike had called El the night before their first day to explain a few things about school, its social norms, and expectations. Within a matter of seconds, she walked through the door and it was just like he had imagined. She looked around in awe. She had never seen so many people in one place. She walked around the halls until she found the water fountain, where her boyfriend was patiently waiting for her.

It all felt surreal like it was happening in slow motion. She ran up to him with a big smile and grabbed his face, holding the sides of it in her hands as she put her lips on his.

"And hello to you too!" he said.

laughs

"*checks watch* Looks like we've got about 20 minutes to kill. What do you wanna do?"

"Let's just talk."

"Okay!" he said, taking off his backpack and sliding down the locker.

"So, are you excited about your first class?"

"Yes, but mostly nervous."

"That's understandable."

"Hey, Mike, would you take a look at my schedule with me? I'm still a little bit confused about where I'm supposed to go to and when."

"Yeah, sure."

After helping her navigate her schedule and talking for about 10 minutes, Mike stood up and helped El to her feet just before putting his backpack on. Once El finished putting hers back on, Mike reached out and grabbed the straps of them, walking his feet toward hers.

She backed up, stumbling a little bit, but with the look that he was giving her, she couldn't help but follow his lead. Mike's gaze was almost hypnotic and for once in her life, El felt powerless. When he looked into her eyes, it felt like they were the only two people in the room and she felt butterflies in her stomach. He then pressed her up against a locker beside the janitor's closet, kissing her lips, cheeks, and neck.

She and Mike had been together for quite a while, yet things still felt so fresh. They felt so comfortable with each other that it was almost like they had known each other their whole lives, but they still had a way of making each other feel all ooey gooey inside.

"*pulls away* I have an idea!" he said.

"What is it?"

"C'mon!" he said, grabbing her hand, interlacing her fingers with his.

"Where are we go-Whoa!" she said as he pulled her arm away, spinning her around into the closet.

"What is this place?" she asked, walking inside.

"It's a closet. What does it look like?" he said, filing in behind her.

"But there aren't any clothes in it..."

"*takes off backpack* That's because it's the janitor's closet."

"Have you gone mad?" she asked, her back facing him.

He snuck up behind her, sliding her backpack straps off, moving her hair to the side, as he whispered in her ear and said:

"I am only what you make me..."

She smiled at his answer as he wrapped his arms around her stomach and moved in on her neck, kissing it tenderly.

Feeling all tingly inside, she placed her left hand on top of his and the other on the back of his head. Once he lifted his head from her neck, she locked eyes with him and brought his face toward hers. Then, she stopped and smelled the roses, once again staring into the clear 8 balls that were his eyes- They always had the answer she was looking for.

The tension was oddly thrilling in a way, and undeniably enticing. He tilted his head and closed his eyes, feeling two familiar lips press up against his own. He loved it when she took the lead. It was extremely sexy! She would start out by kissing him in light pecks and build up from there, with traces of lipgloss leaving her lips and smearing onto his like paint on a canvas. Then, they reached out and grabbed his bottom lip like it was the thing they wanted most. It was almost as if his lips were the pacifier that silenced her cries from deep within and her tongue was the flint that ignited the flame. And with that, there was this inexplicable heat that came over the both of them in that moment, like a fire that just couldn't be put out. He had no other choice but to smother her with love.

But she pulled away and looked down at her shoes, then back at him. He looked at her and everything just felt so unresolved. He wasn't ready to let go of her. He had this dying urge to grab her and kiss her more. She bit her lip, wondering what he was thinking. She figured

there was no harm in asking.

"Hey, what are you thinking?" she asked softly, cocking her head and rubbing his cheek with the back of her hand.

He grabbed her shirtsleeve and pulled her back to his face, kissing her abruptly. This caught her off guard. She put her hands on his shoulders as their kiss neared an end. Before letting go, he bit her lip, pulling it towards him a little, and letting go of it with a bounce. Her then hands left his shoulders and held the ones that held her face. She stepped off of her tippy toes, her heels returning to the ground as she caught her breath. Looking back up at him, she was reminded of that feeling when he first kissed her more than two years before. That same rush, that feeling of, *Oh, so that's how he feels about me and I think I feel the same way.*

"Open your mouth again," he said, his lips hovering over her mouth.

It was things like that that Mike rarely ever said, but whenever he did, it left El feeling like a popsicle on a hot summer day and she melted every time. It wasn't even just what he said, it was the way he said it too.

One thing led to another and the next thing she knew, they were making out. They stumbled around in the closet like Bob and Joyce once had, making quite the ruckus, especially when Mike accidentally tripped over the mop bucket and El fell on top of him.

They both came tumbling down and laughed hysterically, the sounds of their giggles echoing through the door. After the laughter faded, they helped each other up, put their backpacks back on, and casually walked out of the closet. Mike checked his watch, realizing that it was time for them to start heading to class. So, he took El by the hand and walked her to her first period, English.

"*hugs, rubs back* Have fun! *kisses cheek* I'm two rooms down if you need me, but if not, I'll see you in third."

"Okay. See you!" she said, walking into the classroom.

Once she got there, she sat beside Nancy.

"There you are! Big day. You ready?" she asked.

"Yeah, I think so."

Once Mike walked into History, he sat down next to Jonathan.

"It's about time! Where were you?" he asked.

"Janitor's closet," said Mike with a smirky smile.

"Look at you!" said Jonathan, fist bumping him.

Mike loved history but felt a little anxious for El. He tried his best to focus on his own high school experience when by himself.

Back in El's class, Nancy's friend, Ally, passed her a note, saying:

Who's that girl beside you? I've never seen her in here before.

Nancy responded, saying:

She's my brother's girlfriend. She's homeschooled but next year she's going to be attending here, so I'm letting her shadow me.

Ally then said:

What's her name though? I've never seen her around town.

Nancy faked a yawn, passing the note back as she stretched out, which read:

Jane, but we call her El. She's the Chief's kid. He adopted her.

Ally then responded, saying:

Holy shit! You serious?

Unfortunately, the teacher caught them this time.

"Ally, Nancy, passing notes *again*...I'd love to hear what could possibly be more interesting than the works of Charles Dickens!"

"Oh, I don't think that's necessary," said Nancy.

"Oh, you don't, do you? Well, I'd be happy to give you both a detention slip instead. Your choice!"

"Fine. We were just talking about El, *points with thumb* who's shadowing me today."

"I don't believe we've met! I'm Ms. Walters," she said, shaking El's hand.

"Jane Hopper, but most people call me El," she said.

"Well, Miss El, why don't you tell us a little bit about yourself."

"Stand up," Nancy whispered.

"Umm...Hi, *waves* I'm El. I'm homeschooled, I have a dog named Eggo, and my favorite subject in school is science."

"Very nice, thank you," she said.

"Sweetie, you can sit down now," she continued.

"Oh," she said, embarrassed.

students laugh

She was flustered. Her cheeks felt hot and she could feel everyone staring at her. She very well may have just humiliated herself in front of the whole class. She put her head down, waiting for the period to be over. English was already her worst and least favorite subject, but it never made her feel like this.

Ms. Walters occasionally would call on her, which only made things worse. After class, Nancy pulled El aside, saying:

"Hey, that was pretty intense in there. You alright?"

"Yeah, now that it's over!"

"Just ignore Ms. Walters. She's just a bitter old cat lady. She always tries to get under people's skin, but she was in an even bitchier mood today than normal."

"Is school always like this?"

"No. Nobody really likes school, but for different reasons. Usually because of the workload and boring classes. I have a feeling you'll like Home Ec though. It's much more laid back."

Mike on the other hand, had loved Jonathan's history class. The teacher in it had a really good sense of humor. His next class was Typing, which was a total bore, but it was good practice.

In Home Ec, Nancy and El partnered together to make crepes, which El did enjoy a lot. She got to use her powers when no one was looking, chopping the fruit with her mind and other things like that.

By the time that class ended, it was time for third period, Chemistry, which Mike and El both had.

He called her name, waving her over in his direction.

"Hey!" she said, plopping down next to him.

"Hey, gorgeous."

Mike always paid attention during class, but with El there, how could he not get a little distracted every now and then? So, halfway through the class he decided to pass her a note, to check in with her and see what she thought of it so far.

How were your other classes?

She tried to be as discrete as possible, not wanting to get in trouble like Nancy and Ally did with Ms. Walters.

English was a disaster, but I liked Home Ec.

He quickly wrote back:

What happened in English?

She wrote back:

Ms. Walters made me introduce myself and then I didn't know that she

meant for me to sit down afterward, so I stood up way too long and then everyone laughed at me. She called on me a lot too.

Oh no, that's terrible! Are you okay? he said.

Yeah, I'm over it. she replied.

What do you think of Chemistry so far? he asked.

It's kind of confusing, but interesting. she responded.

Good. I just realized how funny it is that we have this class together, given all of the chemistry between us. he said.

This time she didn't respond, but simply just smiled big in his direction

They then paired up as lab partners and performed an experiment together not long after that. Next, was Lunch.

"What'd you bring?" she asked.

"A baloney sandwich, some chips, chocolate milk, apple slices, and a fruit roll-up. What about you?"

"Eggos, chocolate pudding, and apple juice."

"I should've known! *laughs* Well, if you want any of mine, I'd love to share it with you."

"Okay! What's a fruit roll-up?"

"You've never had a fruit roll-up?"

"No."

"It's fantastic! Try it."

"Whoa!"

"Good, right?"

"Yeah, really good, like that kiss in the closet."

"I was wondering if you were gonna bring that up," he said with a smile.

"That was...magical."

"You're magical," he teased, tousling her hair.

"Quite literally," she joked, as she lifted his hand and discretely placing it on top of hers with her mind.

"You know, if you want me to hold your hand, you can just ask," he said, laughing and rubbing his thumb over her index finger.

"Yeah, but what's the fun in that!" she said, wiping the blood away from her nose.

They continued to hang out until 4th period came around.

"Well, El, that's the bell," he said.

"*laughs* You said it like that on purpose, didn't you?"

"Yeah," he shrugged with a smile.

laughs

"Ready for Shop class?" she asked.

"I was born ready," he said.

laughs

[20 minutes later]

"Ouch!"

"What is it?" asked Mike.

"I think I got a splinter."

"I have just the thing for that!" he said, kissing her hand.

"Better?" he asked.

"Much!" she said.

Her next class was French and his, Latin. They soon left for class and later met up in gym for 6th period.

"Mike, you're staring..." she said, as she walked out of the locker room.

"Sorry, it's just, you look yummy in those gym shorts..."

"Mi-ike! *playfully hits* Keep your voice down, people could hear you!" she said.

"So, what if they did! Would that be such a bad thing?" he said, his hands grabbing her waist a little.

Later on, Mike jumped in on a game of basketball. El watched him from the bleachers as he played, cheering him on despite not remembering all of the rules of the game. All she could remember about basketball was the steamy makeout session that came after she played it one-on-one with Mike.

He later climbed up and sat beside her.

"Hey," he said, squeezing her leg.

"Hey," she said.

He chugged almost an entire bottle of water and crushed it in his hand when he was done.

"Man is it hot in here!" he said, leaning against the bleacher behind him.

"Tell me about it!" she said, fanning herself.

He then sat up and took off his shirt to cool down, flexing a little just for her.

"Are you trying to impress me?" she asked.

"Maybe..." he said.

"Well, it's working," she said, staring at his slight ab definition.

After running the mile, El could hardly stand on her own without feeling sore.

"Here, hop on!" he said, crouching.

"But I'm all sweaty..."

"So, am I. Besides, they say that couples who sweat together stay together."

"I never doubted that we would anyway," she said, climbing onto his back.

smiles

She wrapped her arms around his neck and he hoisted her up above his waist. He then carried her to the locker room door and set her down, holding onto his back in pain like an old man as he walked away.

By the time they hit the showers and changed back into their regular clothes, the bell rang and Mike met El back by the same spot where they started the day. He dried his hair off with a striped towel and flicked his bangs to the side, yet another thing that she found irresistible about him. He hung the towel around his neck and said:

"You ready?"

"Yep, let's go," she said, holding his hand in hers.

As they walked to the bike rack, El realized something and stopped Mike.

"Mike," she said, tugging on his shirt sleeve.

"Yeah?"

"Today, when we kissed in the closet...I wasn't scared."

"Of course you weren't! Why would you be?"

"Well, you know, I used to be afraid of the dark and you said I have c-cl-claustr-"

"Claustrophobia?"

"Yeah, that."

"Oh my god, I didn't even think about that! I never should've taken you there...God, I feel like such an idiot now!"

"No, no, Mike, don't say that! You are anything but an idiot and I'm glad you did anyway. Two years ago, I couldn't have stayed in that closet with the door closed, but I can now thanks to you!"

"El, I can't take credit for that! You're stronger than anyone I know. That was all your own doing!"

"Only because I was with you...I've always been better when I'm with you."

"You're so good to me...What did I ever do to deserve you?" he asked, looking into her eyes and running his fingers through her hair.

"I could say the same to you," she said.

smiles

He then kissed her on the head and threw his arm around her as they continued to walk toward the bike rack.

"You wanna hang out with the guys today?" she asked.

"No, today's about us. Let's do something, just you and me. How does that sound?"

"I'm all yours," she replied with a smile.

26. Love Isn't Easy

Hey guys! In this chapter, I really wanted to focus on Mike's character and explore his moodiness and sensitivity as the adorkable teenage boy that he is. So with that being said, this chapter will be a rollercoaster ride of emotions for some of you, but I promise you will love it as much as I enjoyed writing it, especially the ending! Feel free to leave a comment if you like what you read and/or recommend to a friend. Thanks!

XOXO,

K8

It was May 17, 1985, and something was bugging Mike. El first noticed this when she hung out with him that day. He wasn't himself and started acting differently, losing his temper with her over the littlest things. This continued on for about a week but eventually calmed down. He apologized for the way he had treated her and they made up, but whenever El tried to get together with him the following week, he kept avoiding her, making up excuses for why he couldn't hang out. Then on June 1, when he finally decided that he was available, he called her hoping to make plans.

"Hey!" he said.

"Hey!" she said.

"What are you up to?"

"Nothing much."

"Well, if you want something to do, you could come over to my place...We could rent a movie or something."

"I-I wish I could, but I actually have a lot of homework. I was just about to get started."

"Oh okay. Maybe tomorrow then..."

"Yeah, I'd like that."

"Okay, how does 6:30 sound?"

"Sounds great."

"Cool, see you then," he said.

"Okay, bye."

hangs up

The next day, she called him, realizing that she was actually busy that day too.

"Hello?"

"Hey," she said.

"Hey! What's up?"

"Nothing much, but I just realized that I can't hang out tonight."

brief pause

"Are you still mad at me?" he asked.

"What? No, of course not! Why would you say that?"

"I don't know, it's just like we haven't hung out in so long and the two nights that I try to make plans with you, you're conveniently busy. It kinda feels like you're avoiding me..."

"God, not everything's about you, Mike!"

"You're unbelievable..." he said.

"Oh, *I'm* unbelievable?" she said.

"Yeah, you are! Guess I dodged a bullet when you bailed on me!"

"You know, I've been really patient with you up until now, but the fact that you would accuse me of blowing you off is just a bunch of bullshit! I'm the one who's been trying to get together with you for a like a week and you keep making up these stupid excuses. How could

you? You know how I feel about lying..."

"At least I gave you an excuse! You haven't even told me why you can't hang out with me."

"Not that it's any of your business, but my dad and I made plans weeks ago, I had just forgotten about them."

"Oh yeah? Well, that's some daughter you are!" he said.

"Go to hell, Mike," she said, hanging up.

After hanging up the phone, she ran into her room and slammed the door behind her. She then collapsed onto her bed, soaking her teddy bear with her own tears...that was until Hopper came home.

He knocked on the door several times, but there was no answer.

"El, honey, open up please."

He decided to use the key, following the sounds of crying coming from her bedroom door.

"*knocks* Hey, kid. Can I come in please?"

"*sniffles* If you want..." she said.

He walked in and sat beside her, rubbing her back.

"Is it Mike?" he asked.

"Yeah, *sniffles* we had our first fight..."

"Do you wanna talk about it?"

"I don't know."

"Well, I think you should. I think it would be good to get it all out of your system before our evening of fun," he said, tucking her hair behind her ears.

She sat up and wiped her eyes, taking a deep breath before speaking.

"I guess it all started two weeks ago. He's just been acting different ever since then. He's been meaner and more irritable."

"Did he hurt you? I swear, I'll kick his ass if he lays a finger on you..."

"No, no, nothing like that. Something's just bothering him, I can tell. Anyway, but he knew it too and he actually apologized to me."

"Then why are you so upset?"

"Well, that was last week, but every time I tried to get together with him after that, he kept blowing me off, and then when I told him I was busy yesterday and had plans today, he accused me of doing the same."

"He's got *some* nerve..."

"I don't know, he just didn't sound like himself...It almost felt like I was talking to a completely different person, you know what I mean?"

"Yeah, kid, I think I do."

"But I said some things I shouldn't have said too, some things I didn't mean at all..."

"Like what?"

"*sighs* Well, it ended with me telling him to go to hell and then hanging up..."

"Yeesh, little harsh! That's not to say that he didn't deserve it though..."

"*gasps* Do you think he's going to break up with me?" she asked, tearing up once again.

"No, he'd have to be a complete idiot to let *you* go. But he's not an idiot, he's a good guy. He'll come around..."

"But I can't help but wonder if things will go back to the way they were..."

"Don't worry, kid. They will, with time."

"How are you so sure?"

"Because I know you two. You guys spent nearly a year apart and it only made your relationship stronger, not to mention my job as a parent even harder..."

"Thanks, Dad. This was helpful," she said, hugging him.

"Glad to hear it, kid," he said over her shoulder.

"Hey, what do you say I get you a glass of water and then we'll head out to Josie's for dinner?" he asked, pulling away.

"Josie's? Isn't that that new barbecue place?"

"Yeah, I thought we'd give it a try."

"I'd like that," she said.

"Cool. I'll be right back."

In the meantime, she got up and fed the dog before leaving. Then, she chugged the glass of water he had prepared for her, leaving right after.

The whole time El was gone, Mike was kicking himself for getting mad at her the way that he did, but her words hurt him too. They stung, a lot. He never thought that she would say something like that, especially not to him.

When they got home from Josie's, Hopper pulled out Scrabble and started a game with El.

"Damn, you're good! Well, kid, you won!"

"Yes!" she said, pulling her arm down in excitement.

"Demogorgon...Why didn't I think of that one?!"

"Well, you weren't exactly around them as much as I was," she said.

"Yeah, but I've been around them enough to what they are."

"Just not enough to think of the word..." she said.

"Oh, we're getting cocky now, are we? Okay, just wait 'til I kick your ass at Frustration!"

"Bring it on!" she said.

Hopper did whoop El at Frustration but beating him at Clue made all the difference.

The two then decided to watch the movie, Clue, since they played the game that same day. El especially liked how there were several different possible endings. Then, they decided to make it a double feature and watched The Outsiders too. In the middle of it, El heard a knock on the door, one that she would recognize anywhere. She walked over to it and opened it to find Mike standing there in the rain, crying with a black eye.

"Mike, what are you doing he-Oh no! Are you okay?"

"No."

She was still mad at him but she couldn't stand to see him like this. She knew that if he had come all of this way, it wasn't just to bitch and moan. It meant something.

"Oh my god, you're shaking! C'mere, baby," she said, pulling him in for a hug.

He clung to her so tightly that she almost had trouble catching her breath. Going into the hug, she figured eventually one of them would pull away and she would take him to her room to talk things out, but when she tried, he wouldn't let go. She knew that he needed this more now than he ever had before. He wanted nothing more than to be held by the girl that he loved.

"*sniffles* El, I'm sorry. *chokes up* *I'm* the monster," he said over her shoulder.

She pulled away and looked into his eyes.

"Aww, Mike, don't cry! If you cry, then I'm gonna cry..." she said, wiping his tears away.

"I just hate fighting with you!"

"I hate fighting with you too and I'm so sorry for telling you to go to hell! That is not how I wanted things to go at all! I-I didn't really mean it and I never should've said it. *weeps* I'm so sorry...Please forgive me."

He dropped his umbrella and said "I could never stay mad at you," wrapping his arms around her and kissing her forehead to let her know that he accepted her apology.

"Even if you did mean it, I only brought it on myself," he said, leaning his forehead against hers.

"*sniffles* Don't say that..."

"Well, it's true! I haven't been myself lately. It's j-just...*sniffles* Troy, he-"

"Say no more. Here, let's go to my room," she said, guiding him.

"Sorry for interfering with your plans, sir," he said to Hopper.

"That's okay, kid. No sweat!"

They both knelt on the bed, El trying her best to make Mike feel comfortable, propping pillows behind him and everything. She looked at him, concerned, but whatever it was, she had no doubt that they would get through it, they had already been through so much together. She looked deep into his eyes as she readjusted herself on the bed, tucking her hair behind her ears, which revealed her new hoop earrings.

"Tell me everything. What's bothering you?" she asked.

He took a deep breath and said:

"Will and I hung out last week. We were walking around town, on our way to the arcade, and then Troy just popped out of nowhere and

started making all of these mean, homophobic comments about us."

"H-Homophobic?"

"Yeah, it means to be hateful to or afraid of gay people."

"Oh, I see."

"Yeah, I mean, obviously, I'm not gay, but you know, we've never been so sure if Will was or not. People think that just because we're best friends that it automatically means we're gay together, but that's not true at all!"

"I know that," she said, placing her hand in his lap, on top of his hand.

"Well, I'm glad you do. Anyway, but Troy kept calling us both fags and-"

"Fags?"

"Fag is short for the word faggot. It's a really mean thing to call someone who's gay."

"Oh."

"Yeah, so he just wouldn't leave us alone and then when he brought you into it, calling you my decoy girlfriend, that was when I said enough was enough and took a swing at him. It wasn't the best idea on my part, but it just felt right. Then, he gave me this," he said, pointing to his eye.

"Oh, you poor thing!" she said, rubbing his face.

"It's okay! If you think this is bad, you should see the other guy," he said, pointing to the black eye.

"*laughs* You're crazy!"

"El, I want you to know that that's the only reason why I was avoiding you this past week...I just didn't want you to see me like this, I didn't want you to worry, but you deserve the truth."

"I would've understood!" she said.

"I know that now," he said, holding her hand in his.

"You know Troy and I used to be friends?" he continued.

"Really?" she asked, surprised.

"Yeah, good ones too. We were pretty close in elementary school until about 4th grade when Dustin showed up. That was when we started playing D&D, but Troy got jealous easily and had a lot of problems with the other guys. That was when it all started really, this whole feud between us."

"I had no idea!"

"It's pretty hard to believe, I know. It was like one day he was my friend and the next he was my enemy. I remember one time we went to Melvald's together with my mom and there was a secret about one of the guys that I was keeping from him, but when I wouldn't tell him what it was, he said he wouldn't be my friend anymore and just shut me out."

"Gosh, Mike, that's awful! I'm sorry you had to go through that."

"I know...Oh, and I forgot to mention- he wouldn't let it go until I told him, so I had to break my promise. It felt so bad, I've never broken one since."

He then looked her square in the eye and said:

"You know, I've never told anyone about that before."

"Well, I'm glad you shared that with me. I've always wondered why you were so good at keeping your promises..." she said, feeling special.

"I'm glad too. It felt good to get that off my chest."

"Do you think maybe Troy feels about you the way that people think you and Will feel about each other?"

"*laughs* Troy? Gay? I mean, I guess it's possible, but no, I don't think so."

"You never know...He might be all 'I hate Mike' on the outside when really he's just thinking 'Ooh, Mike's so foxy!'" she said, winking.

"Oh my god, I can't breathe!" he said, laughing wheezily.

They kept talking for a while, but then it came up again.

"You know, this whole thing with Troy, I haven't been completely honest with you about it. *sighs* This wasn't the first time he's bothered us this month. There have been several incidents and I promised the guys I wouldn't say anything, but friends don't lie, so technically that means I have to tell you."

"Oh, you and your promises!" she teased.

Then she looked at him seriously and said:

"Mike, I'm just kidding. I'm not mad at you."

"You aren't?"

"Not at all! I know this isn't easy for you to talk about, I'm just glad that you talk to me about it at all!"

"I couldn't think of anyone better to talk to! I swear, sometimes it's like you're the only person who really gets me, El."

"Aww, I love you so much," she said.

"Why?" he asked.

"*Why?*" she repeated, confused.

"Yeah, tell me, why do you love me?"

Mike was one to get a little insecure every now and then. He always gave El the reassurance she needed, but sometimes he himself needed it too. He just didn't know what she saw in him. He always told her how he felt about her, but she, she was a harder cookie to crack. She

showed him more than she did tell him. This was one of his most vulnerable moments and he needed an answer now more than ever. El didn't quite know where to begin, her love for him was just so deep, but she tried her best to tell him everything she knew. She took her time, speaking slowly to make sure that she said everything she wanted to say without tripping over her words too much.

"Because, Mike, you're the best person I know. You're sweet and you're thoughtful and you listen to me and care to know my opinion about things. Before I knew you, my powers were all I knew. It wasn't until I met you that I realized the power a person could have over me. Before you, there was nothing. I had no one, but then you came along and made everything better. You showed me kindness. You taught me how to be happy and you are the reason that I'm happy at all. You always know how to make me laugh and smile, you never let me down, and you always say the right thing at the right time. And I have trouble keeping up with you because you're smart, like really really smart...So smart that it blows my mind sometimes! And it's scary, Mike, it's scary trying to figure out who I am so late in my life, but you've shown me how to do that. Everything feels less scary when you're by my side and I think that's because, with you, it's like I already know who I am. You know me, Mike, you've known me all this time, and you know me better than anyone else, without me fully knowing myself yet. I fell for you so fast that attraction didn't even play a part in it at first. For all I care, you could've actually had a frog for a face and it wouldn't have mattered to me because you're still my Mike! But you're so cute, not just your personality, but your looks too. I could just kiss your sweet, freckled cheeks and look into your deep, brown eyes all day...I just don't think I could ask for a more perfect boyfriend. You're my everything and you make me feel so safe and loved. I mean really, what more *could* I ask for?"

She had never said so much in one sitting. Mike was shocked. He was so proud of her. He already felt so flattered by all of the things that she said, but the fact that her sentences were usually only about the length of two pages in a Dr. Seuss book and she said all of *that* about *him*! That meant everything to him and he didn't take it lightly. In fact, he even teared up a little. El wondered whether they were happy tears or if she had upset him. She hoped it was the first one.

"*sniffles* Oh, El, I love you so much..."

Just as he was about to hug her, El, of course, couldn't help but want to tease him, and with perfect timing said:

"Why?"

The bridge of his nose scrunched up at first, looking like he ate something bitter, and thinking *Are you serious right now?* But despite his annoyance, he found it all very amusing and broke out into laughter, eyes closed with his hand covering his face. Now blushing, he opened his eyes, shyly looking at her through his fingers to avoid embarrassment. But it seemed as though he was worried for nothing, as she was staring right back at him, grinning from ear to ear.

"Why..." he repeated, shaking his head and laughing.

She laughed along with him, accidentally letting out a big snort.

She gasped and covered her mouth with her hand, her eyes bugging out once she realized what just happened.

"Did you just snort?!" he asked, his mouth open in a pleasantly surprised way.

"*May-be*," she said blushing, as her forehead crookedly fell onto his.

They both smiled, feeling the breath of their laughter against one another's cheeks.

Her eyes squinted along with her laugh lines but widened as she looked up into her boyfriend's eyes. His pupils dilated in response, so much so, that it was hard to tell where they stopped and where his irises began. They looked at each other fondly with sparkling eyes that mirrored one another, bouncing back and forth like Pacman. El sighed, now longingly gazing at his lips.

Raindrops trickled down her window, taking different paths until their edges met and collided in blobs. Like them, their faces slowly drew nearer and the tension built, just like the surface tension in the raindrops. El's face brushed against the side of Mike's before lips could touch. She placed her hand on his cheek and rubbed it with her

thumb with such endearment while his fingers softly rested on the side of her neck. As their eyes began to shut, his nose nuzzled into her cheek and their mouths met in the middle, moving playfully and in sync with one another. It was a kiss filled with a tenderness so ardent and unexpected.

After a little smooching, he brought her close to his chest and they snuggled for a bit until realizing that what was originally a daddy-daughter date had turned into an actual date.

"Maybe I should go...I don't want your dad to have yet another reason to hate me," he said.

"No, don't leave! Please stay. You just got here, and besides, I'll miss you too much..."

"Believe me, I would if I could, but this is the right thing to do and I'm kind of grounded anyway..."

"I know, you're right. *sighs* I'll walk you out," she said, standing up and grabbing his hand.

"Glad to see that you two've made up..." said Hopper.

"Yep," said El, hugging onto Mike.

"Sorry again for inviting myself over," he said.

"It's really no trouble," said Hopper.

"Well, I appreciate it. You have a nice night!"

walks over towards door

"Mike, wait," he said.

"Yes, sir?"

"Why don't you join us?"

"Really?"

"Yeah, really. It's pouring out there, I don't want you riding your

puny little bike in that kind of weather. I'll give you a ride home after the movie."

"That's awfully kind of you, sir, but I don't think my parents would be too happy to know that I'm here. I'm technically grounded."

"*sighs* Don't worry about them, I'll give them a ring. I'm sure we can work something out."

"Thank you, sir, really," he said.

"You're very welcome."

And so, the two of them sat on the couch and watched the movie, talking a little as El made popcorn for all of them. She watched them from the kitchen with the biggest smile on her face, one that was not going away anytime soon. Once the popcorn was done, she brought it out and sat in between both of them, as content as either of them had ever seen her.

27. I Wish For You & You Only

Hey guys! So...I didn't get it done before the end of Mileven Day, but you know what, every day's Mileven Day in this fandom! I figured this would be the case, just like I knew deep down that the trailer probably wouldn't come out today, though I couldn't admit it to myself. I just want to see that trailer so much! When is soon, am I right?

You know, it's chapters like these that make me ask myself: Why did I spend over 4 hours writing a speech for a fictional character? Oh, that's right! Because I'm extra af! 🤪🤪 Not to toot my own horn, but after spending like two weeks writing this, I'm kind of in love with this chapter! I hope you guys will be too. Sorry that it's a little lengthy. Okay, maybe "little" is a *little* bit of an understatement! Is it obvious that I miss middle school? Guess you'll find out. :)

P.S. As I was editing, I noticed that I accidentally called her El Wheeler instead of El Hopper in one part...Oops! 🤪 In the words of Bob Ross, "We don't make mistakes. We just have happy accidents."

One fine evening, Mike biked over to El's house to see what she was up to. It had been quite a while since the last time they hung out, as they had both been so busy. He thought he'd go old school and surprise her with a visit. If she was busy, then at least he'd get a little exercise in!

Hopper had recently installed a porch swing that El liked to read books on when the weather was nice. Given that it was sunny out that day, she had decided to bring out her latest read. She was so engaged and captivated by her book. Not even the sound of twigs snapping underneath her boyfriend's bike could alter her focus! But the sound of his voice sure could...

"Hey, Winnie," he said, referencing her book, Tuck Everlasting.

"Mike! Oh my gosh, you scared me!" she said, dropping her book and running into his arms.

"I had to see you. I hope this isn't a bad time...Guess I should've thought that through before I showed up like this."

She slowly pulled away from his shoulder, her face now close to his.

"No, not at all! I'm so glad you're here..." she whispered before her lips met his.

"Mmm, I missed those lips," he said, speaking in between kisses.

El giggles

She walked over to the porch swing and grabbed her book as if she was planning on going inside.

"Whoa, whoa, what are you doing?"

"Just getting my book...Is that *okay* with you...?" she asked, confused by his reaction.

"*speaks really fast but stammers* Oh, yeah, sorry! Y-You didn't do anything wrong, I-I was just thinking-"

"Mike, Breathe. I was only joking!"

"*smiles, sighs* I just meant we don't have to go inside just because I'm here now. If you want to keep reading, I'm totally fine with just hanging out for a bit. Just pretend like I'm not here!"

"But what if I don't want to?"

"Don't want to what?"

"Pretend like you're not here."

"Tha-That's okay too..." he said with a smile, his cheeks reddening a little.

He then sat down on the swing and she sat beside him, close enough so that the side of her hip was jabbing into his. He patted his lap for her to sit on. She sat sideways across his legs, holding onto the back of his neck for support.

"Now, what do you want for Christmas?" he asked in a deep Santa voice.

"*giggles* Hmm, *rubs chin* I want...mistletoe!"

"Whoa, someone's been naughty!"

"Guilty as charged! *kisses cheek*"

Letting go of his neck, she turned around so that her back was against his chest. He held her tightly in his arms and she held them back with her own. She then shut her eyes for minute or two, enjoying the closeness.

"Man, it sure is hot out here...*airs out shirt* Must mean that summer's on its way!" he said.

"I can't wait! I've never spent so much time outside in my life...I won't know what to do with myself!" she said.

"We'll go to the pool every day and to the carnival together, oh, and I think the new mall's going to open then too."

"Oh, I forgot about that!"

"Yep."

"Well, you said you were hot, do you want lemonade or something to drink?" she asked.

"Sure, if it's not too much trouble."

"No trouble. I'll be right back," she said, getting up.

He reclined back in his seat, acting all relaxed. Then, he eyed the door to make sure she was gone and pulled out a set of notecards from his pocket, mouthing the words to himself as he flipped through them. He scratched his head, questioning whether it sounded good or not. He then pulled out a pencil from his coat and made some changes.

Once she came back, she set the two lemonades on the porch deck

beside the swing and laid her hands upon his shoulders.

"What's that?" she asked.

"Oh, it's nothing..."

"Aww, c'mon! I wanna know."

"It-It's a speech."

"A *speech*? For what?"

"Graduation. Since I'm the student body president, I have to address different parts of the ceremony and then I have to give a big speech at the end of it."

"No wonder you're so tense!" she said, massaging his shoulders and kissing his neck.

"Well?" she asked.

"Well what?" he asked.

"Can I see it?"

"I-I don't know, El, it's not very good."

"I'm sure it's better than you think."

"How can you be so sure?" he asked.

"Because I know you, Mike. *pauses* If you won't let me read it, can I at least hear it?"

"Well, I guess it would be nice to give it a run through and try it out on someone else."

"So...Is that a yes?" she asked.

"*giggles, nods* Yes, that's a yes. But don't be too nice about it, I need all of the advice and feedback I can get."

"Promise," she said.

"Pinkie please," he said.

She scoffed at first but then smiled as she hooked her pinkie with his.

"Let's hear it!" she said.

"Alright, alright," he said.

begins reading

"Wait, Mike."

"Yeah?"

"Don't clench your cards so hard. Just relax."

"You're right. *pauses to think, gasps* I know! I'll stand up and practice as if I was at the podium."

"Good idea," she said.

continues

"Okay, Mike, just because I said not to clench your cards so hard doesn't mean you should be staring at them any harder."

"True, true," he said, nodding. "Sorry, I'm just nervous I guess."

"Mike, *grabs wrist* you have nothing to worry about. You're going to do amazing! In fact, I don't even think you need those cards! You seem to know it really well. *pauses* If you need something to look at, look at me. You can try spotting me out in the crowd."

"I can't think of a friendlier face I'd rather see than yours..." he said with a smile.

She did that classic El Hopper "look down at the ground, then smile back at him" bit that drove him wild.

continues reading

His heartbeat came to a slow and steady pace just at the sight of her, improving his articulation and energy by a ton. He couldn't wait for

her to hear the part about her at the actual ceremony.

"Is that it?" she asked.

"No, there's more, but that's all I want to read for now."

"Why? Am I in it?" she asked with a curiosity so enthusiastic.

"*May-be...*"

"Aha! I knew it!" she said, her face changing into a big ole smile.

"C'mere, you," he said, pulling her chin in for a kiss.

It was a kiss of innocence and love so profound. His lips pinkened more and more at the touch of hers.

"Oops, I got a little lipstick on you. Here, let me get it off," she said.

"*licks fingertips, wipes* You have such a cute smile..." she added.

"Not as cute as yours," he said, leaning his forehead against hers and rubbing his nose with hers.

giggles

"See!" he said, pointing it out.

She blushed and slicked her hair back, though it naturally fell back in place no matter how many times she pushed it otherwise. Mike always found this to be very attractive. There was something about it that was so juvenile and so genuine, as it should be.

"I love you, Mike," she said.

"I love you too, El."

It was now June 10, 1985, the day that Mike and his friends would all graduate from middle school and become high schoolers at last. The ceremony was at the school auditorium with a reception by the town gazebo.

All of the party's parents, siblings, relatives, and friends sat in the

same section. Mrs. Wheeler, being the punctual woman that she is, made sure to get there extra early in order to get the best seats. The Wheelers entered the row where Joyce and Jonathan were sitting. Nancy walked to the very end of the row, sitting in the empty seat beside Jonathan and with Holly in his lap, Mr. Wheeler sat to the left of Mrs. Wheeler, who sat three seats away from Joyce, making sure to save a seat for El and Hopper.

"Hi, Joyce!"

"Hey, Karen. You know you can sit here, right? I don't bite!"

"*chuckles* No, it's not that. I was just saving a seat for El and Jim. I figured you'd want to sit with them."

"Oh, are they coming? I didn't realize. Well, that's very sweet of you. Thanks!"

"Oh, don't mention it!" she said.

Just as the ceremony was about to start, Ted felt a delicate hand tap his shoulder. He looked up to find a beautiful young woman standing before him. She looked so grown up that he hardly even recognized her, though she was someone who he found spending an awful lot of time in his house in the past few months. His face lit up, to Karen's surprise. Ted was someone who didn't often smile, but El tended to have that effect on people.

He picked up Holly and stood up, allowing Hopper and El to come through.

"Hey, honey. *kisses*" said Hopper.

"Hey! I'm so glad you made it!" said Joyce.

"I wouldn't miss this for the world. I'm really looking forward to seeing Will up there today."

"What about Mike?" she whispered.

"Mike too."

El hugged Mrs. Wheeler and sat beside her.

"Oh, El, that dress is lovely! You look like a princess."

"Well, I think that's a bit of an overstatement, but thank you!"

"Mike sure doesn't..." she said, pointing him out with her eyes.

On the stage, Mike is seen swatting his friends and pointing at El with a lovestruck expression on his face. She smiled at the sight and waved at him, blowing him kisses from her seat.

Hopper caught El fidgeting in her chair a lot, twiddling her fingers, messing with her hair. He turned to her, concerned:

"*whispers* You alright?"

"Yeah, just wish I could be there with them, you know?" she whispered.

"*whispers* I know, kid," he said, throwing his arm behind her shoulders and playing with strands of her hair.

"But you know what?" he whispered, looking at her, "I bet they're glad you're here."

"*whispers* You really think so?"

"I know so," he whispered.

El smiles, turns, and gives her attention to the stage

El sometimes experienced her own share of separation anxiety, but not from Hopper, from Mike. Mike was like a necessity to her, as he had not only met her physiological and safety needs but also showed her what it meant to have human relationships. It wasn't easy for her to watch Mike from afar without actually being able to be with him, but she was no stranger to it. That was practically all she did the first year she lived with Hopper. Those were the days when Mike would call her every night to see if she was still there. He believed in her when no one else did. She looked at him and saw the same boy that found her in the woods that one rainy night and shared his home

with her for a week, feeding her, clothing her, and befriending her. Of course, there was something more there than friendship, something far more powerful and far more meaningful- Love. And so, he called her each and every night for the 353 days that they were apart, after only having known her for a week's time. Each of those nights, he told her how he felt about her, how strong his feelings were for her. He explained them to her in a way that she could understand. He had already told her that he liked her, he even kissed her, but he hadn't told her why he felt that way about her or what it meant to him. He put himself out there, not really knowing whether or not she reciprocated his feelings unless he based it on the fact that she smiled after he kissed her and showed interest in going to the Snow Ball with him.

But El felt things for him the whole time. She never really thought about it until he showed her what it meant to like someone, but when she could no longer be with him, it was all she thought about. In fact, her feelings for him grew the more time they spent apart. Their connection was one so strong and so unique that it left them both with a lasting impact when they could not be with one another. Seeing Mike walk across that stage reminded El of those feelings that started to develop when she couldn't see him. That one kiss, the things he had said to her and promised her that night, it all opened a floodgate of feelings, feelings that El didn't know what to do with or even know she was capable of having in the first place. She started to look at him differently, to think about him in ways she never had before. Suddenly, he wasn't just Mike anymore. Now, he was Mike, this perfect guy that went out of his way to care for and protect her. He made her feel good about herself and helped her find her place in the world. He was someone that El found herself very attracted to. He was unconditionally kind and super bright, and she loved the way that he lit up whenever he saw her. She started to think about him more and more. Mike was special. He touched her in a way that no one ever had and she didn't want to live in a world without him any longer. He was her rock, her person, the love of her life. She felt so lucky to have him back in her life after nearly a year of hopelessly waiting.

Sometimes Mike felt lost when he was with El. It baffled him how you could be away from someone for so long and still feel like they

were there the whole time, experiencing everything with you. It was almost as if she had never left! Through those 353 calls he made to her, he had revealed so many things about himself and his life. Sometimes it felt like there was no mystery left in him, as she knew all of his secrets and all of his tricks. El, on the other hand, was a complete mystery. He knew who she was as a person, but there were still so many things that he didn't know about her, such as her interests, her hobbies, her aspirations. But El felt the opposite way. She felt left out from and out of touch with the rest of the party. Despite being the protector and hero of the group, she couldn't help but feel a little lonely and jealous of the rest of them, as she was missing the one thing that they all had in common- School. Sure, she was homeschooled, but she hated it. She had to do twice as much work as all of the other kids because she still had years of schooling to catch up on and Hopper wasn't around enough during the day to give her the proper education she needed. Aside from that, there was also the fact that her friends had all spent a year without her and had experienced things together at school that she couldn't relate to. Being behind in her education only made understanding their jokes and stories harder, but Mike never minded explaining them to her. It just wasn't easy. She felt as though she was still catching up in all parts of her life, except with Mike, as he provided her with a sense of stability in her ever-changing life and she was more confident in their relationship than she was in anything else. Seeing him walk across that stage made her forget all of those negative thoughts and filled her mind with vicarious happiness for her friends. Soon, she too would be in school with them.

"And now a word from our student body president, Mike Wheeler," said Mr. Clarke.

"Good evening," said Mike.

"Good evening," the crowd repeated.

He started out by addressing the orders of business, such as where the nearest exits and bathrooms were.

"Please rise for our national anthem," he said.

anthem plays

Then, he announced the different award categories and helped Mr. Clarke hand them out to the students. After doing so, Mr. Clarke said:

"Now, Mike?"

"Yes, Mr. Clarke?"

"While I've still got you up here, would you mind helping me out with something?"

"Sure thing, sir."

"Alright then. *whispers* Read this for me please."

"The Hawkins Humanitarian Award was created to recognize outstanding individuals who dedicate their time to fighting indifference, intolerance, and injustice and whose accomplishments are consistent with the goals of the school and community," said Mike.

El knew just from the description of the award that it had Mike's name written all over it. There was just no one else that was quite as devoted to people as Mike was. She thought to herself: *If only everyone knew all of the things that he's done for me. Not one person in this room knows just how incredible he is, but I do.* She grabbed Mrs. Wheeler's hand for comfort as she waited to find out whether or not it was him after all.

Mr. Clarke continued:

"This award goes to someone who has shown compassion not only towards their fellow peers and teachers, but also Hawkins as a whole. This student is not only a pleasure to have in the classroom but is someone that I have had the honor of working and collaborating with in our school's A.V. Club. Not only have they shown great leadership and made numerous donations towards the club, but they have also shown great recognition of minority populations through their contributions of the debate team's anti-racism and anti-bullying campaigns and the implementation of the PTA's Homeschool Travel program. That is why it is my great honor to present this year's Hawkins Humanitarian Award to Mike Wheeler!"

El was so happy for him. Naturally, she cheered for him like nobody's business, so much so that the ground shook a little beneath her. Hopper noticed a streak of blood leak from her nose and held his pocket square up to her left nostril.

"Easy there, tiger!" he said.

"So that's why you wore a pocket square! I knew it was weird," she said.

"What? That's not why I-*sighs* Can't a man just wear a pocket square to look nice for his girlfriend?"

"Oh, well now I feel bad!"

"You should feel bad for making fun of your old man like that...Just be glad I brought a red one!" he said.

Several other students received awards throughout the ceremony, but once it got to the personality category, there was none other than Dustin Henderson himself that was deserving of not just one, but two awards.

"Middle school wouldn't be middle school without its funny moments. That is why we'd like to take this time to recognize our Class Clown. This person is someone who never fails to make me smile, not to mention has a very contagious smile themselves. Sometimes we need a little hilarity to remind us that life's not all work and no play. One of my favorite memories of this student is when they saw a breast pump during our sex ed unit and asked if it was a breathing mask. *pauses for crowd laughter* I think based on that, it is fair to say that this student has an incredible sense of humor and has the ability to make us all laugh even when they don't mean to. And that is why our school would not be the same without our very own teenage comedian, Dustin Henderson."

"*with his best Elvis impression* Thank you, thank you very much!" said Dustin with a big, goofy smile and a curtsy.

"*whispers* Hang on just a second, bud," said Mr. Clarke.

"For those of you who don't know Dustin, he is not only a jolly,

happy soul but also displays a deep curiosity for learning. Our local librarian recently shared with me that there was one instance where he checked out 10 books at once, despite knowing that the limit was 5 at a time. This did not surprise me, as I remember once when he went as far as to call me on the weekend just because he wanted to know how to build a sensory deprivation tank. I told him to talk to me about it on Monday, but he insisted. It is this kind of persistence for knowledge and dedication to learning that we look for in all of our students, but is rare and hard to find. That is why I would also like to honor Mr. Henderson with the Enthusiastic Learner Award. Congratulations, Dustin."

"Thank you, m'lord," he said jokingly.

After all of the sports and arts category awards were announced, it came down to the last category: General Student Achievement.

"The Student of the Year Award recognizes one exemplary student for their character, service and outstanding contributions, and academic achievements. Nominees must be students in good standing and have a minimum GPA of 3.0. This year, we have picked a student who has not only demonstrated a great deal of academic achievement but has also been known to have a lasting impact on our students and teachers. This student has had a difficult time during their time at Hawkins Middle for reasons that I won't mention, though they do not go unrecognized. Despite these circumstances, they have continued to keep a positive attitude and have touched many of us in the process. I am proud to present to you our Student of the Year, Will Byers."

Everybody froze. Silence filled the room. There was a brief moment where it felt like time itself stopped. Whispers filled the seats behind him, the echoing of the nickname "Zombie Boy" hitting him with each step he walked. Will was shocked most of all. He could've sworn that the lights were going start flickering or something was going to come out of the walls and take him. *There's just no way that something like this could happen to somebody like me if it didn't involve some sort of supernatural force*, he thought to himself. But he was wrong. Nancy, Jonathan, Joyce, Hopper, and El all stood up at once and broke the silence with their cheers. Then came Mike, Lucas, Dustin, and Max and all of their parents and family. Within no time, the whole room was practically screaming his name and clapping for him.

"Congratulations, Will. You earned it."

"Thanks, Mr. Clarke!"

"And now for our final award, The Principal's Award. The Principal's Award is a true honor that many of us are not nearly lucky enough to receive. This award celebrates outstanding achievement by dedicated students in the realms of academics, sports, arts, and other contributions to their school. I will now provide you with a brief description of our recipient. *clears throat* This student is someone who I have come to know very well over the past few years. This student is hardworking, shows great leadership, has excelled in all of their classes, and has been very involved in a number of extracurriculars. So, without further ado, this year's Principal's Award goes to...Lucas Sinclair!"

"Holy shit," Lucas muttered under his breath.

"That's my baby!" Mrs. Sinclair pridefully shouted from the audience.

This was a big deal. This win would spark a lot of controversy on account of Lucas' race. He was the first black student to ever get the principal's award, let alone any award at all in the history of Hawkins Middle. This would potentially change the face and whole dynamic of the school, but he was ready for the challenge. As their ranger, he was ready for any challenge that awaited him and he knew that now.

"Congratulations, Lucas," said Mr. Clarke as he pinned the pendant to his jacket, handed him his certificate, and shook his hand.

"Thanks, Mr. Clarke," he said, hugging him.

As he turned to the crowd and held up his diploma, his classmates started cheering behind him: *LU-CAS! LU-CAS! LU-CAS!*

On the way back to his seat, Max pulled him aside and whispered in his ear, saying:

"Wait to go, Stalker. *kisses cheek*"

"Thanks, Zoomer," he said with a wink, kissing her hand as he passed by her.

Throughout middle school, Mike and his party may have been losers in the eyes of most, but today they were winners without a doubt.

After all the awards had been distributed, Mr. Clarke called each of the students down in alphabetical order to receive their diploma. Mike's was the last name to be called. He walked across the stage and grabbed his diploma, looking back into the crowd and blowing a kiss in El's direction before giving his speech. Afterward, he walked with Mr. Clarke to the podium and waited by his side as he said:

"Let's all give a hand for our 8th grade class of 1985."

A roar of oohs, yeahs, screams, and claps exuded from the crowd in response.

"And now I'd like to welcome back our student marshall, Mike Wheeler, to close with a speech."

"Thanks, Mr. Clarke," he said inaudibly.

Mike began speaking. As he spoke, he thought about what El had told him that day by the porch swing. He loosened up and whenever he was feeling nervous, he searched for El in the crowd. When he first laid eyes on her, he immediately calmed down. There was something so intimate about the way he made direct eye contact with her when he talked about her in his speech. It made her feel like they were the only two people in the room.

"Middle school. *brief pause* What is the first thing that comes to your mind when you think of middle school? Last week, I asked each of my 8th grade classmates this same question. After hearing all of their answers, I have come to the conclusion that middle school is the braces that conceal your teeth, and it is the food that gets caught in between. It is that clammy feeling you get in your palms when you have to present in front of the class. It is when you asked to go to the bathroom and your voice cracked. Middle school is the combination to the locker you can never get open. And it is the sweaty gym uniform that you find sitting inside it once you finally do. Middle school is the answer you left blank on a test. It is the dirty joke you made after sex ed. It is the report card you hid from your parents, it is the inside joke that only you and your friends will get. Middle

school is seeing your first fight in the lunchroom, it is the Eggo you scarfed down when you were in a hurry. Middle school is puberty and all its awkwardness. It is the crush that comes out of nowhere and hits you like a school bus. Why it is even the butterflies you get in your stomach!

Almost all of us can agree with or relate to at least one of these statements. We can all recognize these commonalities, but for others, middle school wasn't nearly as bright and shiny. Awkward didn't even begin to describe it. For some people middle school was bullies, racism, sexism, homophobia- the list goes on. For me, middle school was the Ghostbusters suit I wore to school on Halloween. And it was also the redness on my cheeks when no one else wore a costume but me and my friends. It was the pair of knuckles that struck my face in the schoolyard every week. And it was the dreadful nickname that people wouldn't ever let me forget. Middle school was finding what appeared to my best friend's body in the quarry. And it was the police lights that flashed across my lawn. It was the woods where I searched for him with my friends and it was the smiles that spread across our faces once he was found. Middle school was the polaroid picture my mom took of me before the school dance. Middle school was even my first kiss!

So many things have happened to me these past few years, some that were great and others that are too painful to even talk about, but middle school was still the best time of my life. Middle school was when I met my first crush, my first love, and my beautiful girlfriend, El Hopper. Now, I know what you're thinking. Oh lord, here goes nerdy lover boy again, ranting about his girlfriend for the 40 billionth time! Well, I may be bragging on her a little, but I'm here to tell you that my girlfriend, El, has had a life rougher than most. She is the strongest person I know and I have learned more from her in one week than I have in all three years of middle school. As a victim of abuse, she taught me so much about pain and has given me an entirely new outlook on life. Life is what you make it. You can put any twist on it that you want, but that doesn't change the way it is. We have to approach each day one step at a time and have each other's backs because if we don't, we're just going to fall on our faces.

A wise man by the name of Scott Clarke once said that middle school

is humanity at its finest. I think that in many ways this is true. Middle school is like this one big magnifying glass. It zooms in on all of the things that make us who we are. But at the end of the day, it all boils down to our similarities and our differences. Humans wouldn't be humans if it weren't for our flaws. It's okay to be different! Instead of trying to hide in the bathroom stalls from the harsh realities that await us, we should be celebrating what makes us us. So, in the spirit of middle school, I'm going to leave you with an assignment. I encourage you all to find what middle school means to you. Think about what you did wrong and what you did right, the tears you shed, the laughs you shared. Who were you in middle school? *pauses* Thank you."

The crowd went wild. Mike walked back to his seat on the stage in a clamor of claps and cheers coming from the audience. He looked back in disbelief. He couldn't believe his eyes and ears. He thought his speech was a little cheesy, a total flop, but his hard work had really pulled off.

As El's eyes grew glassier, she could feel her cheeks start to moisten. She wiped her eyes dry until her vision was no longer blurry, and smiled big, clapping until her hands were even redder than her face. She was so moved by his speech and by the ceremony as a whole. She was so proud of each and every one of her friends and couldn't wait to tell them in person.

"Well, that just about concludes our evening. There's a reception by the town gazebo for those who are interested. Thank you to all those who came out today and have a good night! All students are dismissed," said Mr. Clarke.

After leaving the stage, all of the kids' families and El gathered outside. Mrs. Wheeler introduced El and Hopper to her father and Mike's other two grandparents, as well as some of his aunts, uncles, and cousins. She was so pleased to meet them and so were they.

She congratulated each of her friends as they came out. It wasn't until a little later that she saw Mike, as he had stayed back to help the teachers. Typical behavior of a humanitarian like him. Once he came out, he was summoned away by the waves of people stopping to compliment him on his speech. As he was talking to one man, his

eyes traveled to the angelic girl dressed in white standing off in the distance.

"I'm sorry, will you excuse me?" he said, cutting him off and bolting in the other direction.

He ran towards her and caught her in his arms, saying "C'mere, you." Suddenly, she felt her feet leave the ground as he picked her up and spun her around. She giggled and squealed in response. Once he set her down, he stopped for a second to take a good look at her. She was wearing a beautiful strapless dress with a cinched waist and a poofy circle skirt. It was white with a pale blue, yellow, and green floral pattern that was so faint, it almost looked as if it was painted with watercolors.

"Wow. Well, I think it's safe to say that that dress just earned you the nickname AngEL."

"Aww, I like that! It has a nice *wing* to it."

"*laughs* I love that my dorky sense of humor has rubbed off on you."

smiles

Suddenly, she gave him a look that made him think she wanted something.

"What?" he asked.

"Nothing," she said.

"No, seriously, what is it?"

"Just you. *strokes his bangs* You're so handsome, you and your bowtie!" she said, standing up on her tippy toes to adjust it.

He looked at her and blushed. Her hair looked even more beautiful than usual. It was at about shoulder length now, the right side of it pulled back with a sterling silver barrette that had an intricate design engraved into it. There was something so billowy about her hair because of how wavy and curly it was, but it was actually thicker

than it looked. Mike could never keep his hands off of it. He stood there and looked at her with a look of endearment, playing with the ends of it and running his fingers through the different strands.

Now holding hands, the two of them walked over to the rest of their friends, catching the tail-end of their conversation.

"Hey, guys. Sorry, I got caught up cleaning the auditorium," said Mike.

"This bitch...I swear. He's always helping people," Max teased.

"I'd watch who you're talking to if I were you..." he said.

"Oh, and why is that?" she asked.

"Haven't you heard? I've been deemed a true Humanitarian now."

"Yeah, but you're not the student of the year," said Will.

"Student of the year, schmudent of the year. None of you will ever have the honor of being the first black student to win the Principal's Award," said Lucas.

"Lucas, you can only use the black card so many times," said Mike.

"Oh, I'll show you more than a black card," said Lucas, holding his hand up and balling it into a fist.

"Ladies, ladies! You three may have gotten the highest honorary awards, but none of you have two," said Dustin.

"Well, sorry to one-up you, dude, but guess what? I don't have any awards!" said Max.

"The fact they didn't call your name for any of the sports category awards is total bullshit...You had those in the bag!" said Lucas.

"It's just because you came late in the year, it doesn't mean anything," said Mike.

"You're damn right it doesn't! That's why I have something better for

you than any stupid award," said Lucas.

"What is it?" asked Max.

"Well, I'm glad you asked. *takes hand*"

"I know how much you've been missing the beach, so I thought we'd bring the beach to you," he said, opening the car trunk and taking out a surfboard.

"Lucas, what is this?"

"We all signed up for a surfing camp in Whiting, IN by the southern shore of the Great Lakes."

"You really did all of this for me?" she asked.

"Of course! You're my zoomer."

"I love you, Stalker, you know that?"

"Love you too, MADMAX."

Later on, Mike catches up with Lucas and says:

"Hey, about what I said earlier...I hope I didn't offend you with the whole 'black card' business."

"Nah, don't sweat it, man."

"You know I didn't mean anything by it, right? I was just joshin' ya."

"Of course you were. I would've whooped your ass if I knew that you weren't kidding and I wasn't ever actually going to give you a black eye anyway. It was just for laughs."

"I know, it's just, you can never be too sure..."

"Well, I appreciate your concern."

"So, are we cool then?"

"Yeah, we're cool," he said, dabbing up on him (before it was actually

called that).

"In all seriousness, I'm really proud of you. You deserved that award, man," said Mike, patting the back of his shoulder.

"Thanks, man."

"Anytime."

After the gang hung out at the reception, El, Hopper, and the Wheelers all headed to dinner. The restaurant was a little ways away, as it wasn't your typical Chinese restaurant. Instead of it being a casual, take-out restaurant with red-painted booths, it had fancy, pink tablecloths and flowers on the tables.

Dinner went well. Hopper enjoyed getting to know Mike's family better and Mrs. Wheeler thought it was nice to see another side of Jim. Underneath that tough cop exterior, he was a very gentle soul, a softie if you will. He always told the greatest stories. Though he had been through a lot, he had lots of fun moments to share about his youth.

El liked Mike's family a lot but not nearly as much as they liked her. There was something about her natural quirkiness that appealed to all of them. As they ate, El soon discovered that Mike's grandmother had died several years ago and that the blond wig she had worn when she first met Mike was what his grandmother wore when she had cancer. This made her sad, though she couldn't help but want to know more about her after learning this. It was almost as if having worn her wig somehow made her feel connected to her in a way.

As Hopper and Mike's parents were deciding how they were going to split the bill, Mike took El by the hand and led her to the stone bench outside by the restaurant. They sat and talked for a bit, though El started to space out a little, distracted by the sound of the koi pond across from her. She decided to explore it herself.

gets up

Mike follows

"Pretty neat, huh?" he said, leaning his chin against her shoulder and

wrapping his arms around her waist.

"Yeah, but why are there coins at the bottom?"

"They're for wish-making. You're supposed to close your eyes, throw one in, and make a wish."

"Got any change?" she asked, looking back at him.

"Yeah, here," he said, handing her a penny and then taking one himself.

"What are you going to wish for?" she asked.

"Beats me!" he said. "I haven't really thought about it much yet."

"Me neither."

El stared in plain space, squinting and rolling her eyes around as she puckered her lips and thought of what to wish for. She decided to check in with him again, hoping that whatever Mike said would somehow influence her own wish.

"Got anything in mind?" she asked.

"Not yet, you?"

"Nope."

"Let's keep thinking. It'll come to us," he said.

Mike stood silently for a moment, tapping the penny against his chin while pondering what to wish for. He felt so lucky and fortunate already. He and the people he was closest to had been through so many hardships but had all come out of it stronger and better than ever. He just felt lucky to be alive and in love in the first place.

"Still nothing?" she asked.

"No! This is ridiculous. I can't think of a single thing!"

"Maybe that's not such a bad thing. It means that you're satisfied with what you have."

"Yeah, I was just thinking the same."

Everybody wants what they can't or don't have. That's essentially what wanting means, but nobody ever thinks to want what they do have. What would happen if you wished for something that you already had? Would it guarantee that you will continue to have it?

"What would happen if you wished for something that you already had?"

"I don't know but I don't think it would work. The whole point of a wish is to ask for something that you want."

"Yeah, but what if what you want is what you already have?"

"Then I suppose you just keep wishing for what's already yours."

"Exactly!" she said, raising her eyebrows and pointing at him with her eyes.

Without her having to say a word, he knew exactly where she was going with this just based on her body language alone. She wanted them to wish for love, for not just this moment but a thousand more like it.

"So, we're both in agreement to wish for *bounces finger back and forth* this."

nods

Mike opened up his palm and El opened up hers, both hands containing their own coins. With one stare, both pennies rose from the surface of their hands and levitated up into the air.

"Wha-What are you doing?" he asked.

"Just trust me," she said. "Close your eyes."

eyes shut

She moved closer to him, leaning in towards the left of his face.

Starting to sense the feeling of her face nearing his, he leaned to the right of her face, not realizing which direction she was going in. His lips got closer to hers, just barely missing the mouth.

"Wrong way, silly," she said through giggles as their noses touched at the center.

"*giggles* Sorry," he said.

Their noses both shifted to the left of one another's faces and they kissed, with El throwing each of the coins into the pond the moment their lips touched.

She immediately wiped her nose and looked back at him shyly. He, however, was not so shy. His eyes had a boldness to them, one that made her weak in the knees and eager with curiosity.

"What are you looking at me like that for?" she asked.

"I just can't get over how beautiful you look! That dress looks stunning on you...It is missing a little something though," he said, walking behind her.

But he had just the thing. He fished through his jacket pocket for a promise he had been wanting and meaning to make for quite some time. He reached his arms over her head and hung that promise around her neck like an ornament on a Christmas tree. It sat on her chest, just below where her collarbone started. She looked down at it and smiled.

"Jewelry? Mike, this is awfully sweet of you, but shouldn't I be the one getting you a present? You're the one who graduated after all..."

"Hypothetically, yeah, I guess, but this is more of a gesture than it is a gift."

"Oh? And what might that gesture be?"

"Well, I know it's a kind of late in our relationship for me to be giving this to you, but this is my promise. This is my promise to you, that no matter what happens, no matter where we are or how long we're apart, no matter who gets in our way, or even if the evils that lurk

below Hawkins destroy this cursed old town as we know it, I will always, always love you."

"Mike..." she said with a smile, shaking her head in disbelief and pulling his body close to her own.

In a long swaying motion, they hugged one another tenderly. Holding onto his shoulder from behind his back, she clutched the fabric of his suit between her knuckles. As she did this, something started to fill her. And so she looked at him, with tears in her eyes and love in her heart, and said:

"*sniffles* I love you, always and forever."

"Always and forever *sniffles*," he repeated for emphasis, letting his head fall onto hers.

At first, she looked at him, his eyes, his lips. Then, her eyes traveled to the new trinket that dangled below her chin and she grasped it with her fingers, lifting it up ever so slightly so that it was right at her eye level.

"It's...beautiful! Where did you get it?"

"It's an old family heirloom of mine."

"A family what now?"

"Heirloom. It means it's something valuable that's been passed down in a family over the course of many years. It used to be my grandmother's before she died, but I think it's been in our family for generations. Kind of perfect considering that I basically promised I'll love you forever, huh?"

"More than perfect, romantic! I can't believe you gave me your family's necklace..."

"It's actually a locket. *opens up* See?"

"Aww, Mike! I've always wanted one. How did you know?"

Without saying a word, he held one of his hands up to his face and

brought each of the tips of his fingers together, blowing over them all at once. She laughed at first, but then a thought occurred to her.

"Wait, is your mom okay with this?"

"Yeah, I think she's totally fine with it, in fact, I know she is. Nancy already inherited a different one, so she'll be thrilled for you to you have this."

"Well, I'm so grateful for it. I'll take really good care of it, I promise."

"I know you will."

"You know, Mike, you really didn't have to do this. I appreciate your need to feel like you have to spoil me all the time, but I don't need a material thing to know that you love me and I love you. I have everything I need right here."

He looked at her and smiled, saying:

"I know I didn't have to, but I wanted to. Just like I want to do this now more than anything," he said, kissing her one last time before leaving.

28. Summer Lovin

Hey guys! Sorry for taking so long again. Just finished taking all of my AP exams while also being sick and having a solo in High Hopes for my A Cappella group. Talk about busy! Anyway, I'm still trying to wrap up the story best I can before season 3 comes out, but don't worry, I'll probably write another Mileven fanfic after season 3 :)

P.S. Have you guys seen *The Society* on Netflix? I just finished watching it and it's really good! It's dark, but it's really good and I'm already attached to another new ship, but Mileven will *always* be the og. I might write about them later on this year though, who knows...

~Enjoy!

The bell rings. Students leave in a clamor of cheers, pushing through the crowd to exit through the door.

It was the last day of school for Mike and his friends, well, almost all of his friends. One of his "very special" friends was continuing her homeschooling throughout the summer in order to get up to speed with the high school curriculum. She protested a little at first, but ultimately she knew it was what was best for her in the long run.

All Mike could think about was getting home. Not to his actual house, but to his other home, El. El was his home away from home and he was hers, though he had always been her actual home, even from the start. He couldn't wait to spend the whole summer with her...swimming, shopping, watching movies, playing outside- the world was their oyster now that all threats were gone!

Before leaving the school, he borrowed the school phone to call her.

rings

answers

"Hello?"

"It's officially summer! You know what that means..."

"*giggles* I'm not sure I do..."

"It means whatever we want it to mean!"

"As it should be," she chimed in.

"So, pack a swim bag because it's high time we go swimming together...in public."

"Yeah, I'd like that," she said with a smile.

"And don't forget to bring sunscreen. I wouldn't want your precious skin to get scorched by the sun. You can only make that mistake so many times!"

"How sweet of you!"

"Well, I don't know about you, but I burn like toast so I wouldn't want that to happen to you."

"*chuckles* I love toast."

"I love *you*."

"I love you too."

"Well, I'll see you soon I guess."

"Yeah, see you then."

"Bye, El!"

"Bye, Mike!"

hangs up

Suddenly, she went from being calm and flirty to anxious and freaking out. She didn't have any bathing suit, well, at least not one that fit her anymore. So, she proceeded to call Max and ask if she could borrow a bathing suit.

"Sorry, I hate to ask this of you, but it's just...they don't fit me anymore, you know, since puberty hit me."

"*laughs* I know what you mean, El. Puberty's a bitch, but at least it did something right."

"Damn straight!"

"Haha! *pauses* Tell you what, how 'bout I meet you halfway, so that way you'll make it back home in time."

"Sounds good."

"Awesome. See you then!"

hangs up

[15 minutes later]

"I brought a couple of options, so just choose whichever one you want."

"Thanks so much! What would I ever do without you?"

"Haha, no problem! So, what will it be?"

"This one," she said, holding up the white cherry blossom bikini.

"Good choice. I think that one'll look good on you."

"Thanks. I'll give it back to you sometime this week."

"No need."

"Huh?"

"Keep it! I have plenty more at home."

"Are you sure?"

"Hell yeah! You're just lucky that I happened to live in California because I have a gajillion bathing suits!" said Max.

laughs

"Promise me you'll call me afterward and tell me everything?" asked Max.

"Did you really even have to ask?"

"Guess not. *sighs* Well, I gotta go. Lucas and I are hanging out today too."

"Cool, well, I wanna hear all the details too!"

"Don't worry, I'll make sure to fill you in."

"Good."

"Well, I'll see you later, best friend!"

"Bye, girl!"

By the time El made it back to her house, Mike was only a few minutes away, so she had to quickly get her swim bag together and get changed.

After opening the door for him, she finished putting on her clothes. He peered around her bedroom door to check in.

"Hey, El. You almost ready?"

"Yeah, almost," she said, struggling to reach behind her as she tied her bikini.

"Here, let me help," he said.

"Okay, thanks."

"There, all done."

She turned around and shyly smiled, putting a top on over it as she said:

"Hey, guess what?"

"What?"

"It's the 11th today!"

"Yeah, how 'bout that," he said, kissing her.

Once they got to the pool, they made sure to secure a spot in the shade to put their stuff, perhaps one with an umbrella stuck down the middle of the table.

"Ready?" she asked.

"Not quite. We gotta put on sunscreen, remember?"

"Oh...*right*."

"My mom used to nag me about this all the time, so I'm just used to using it now."

"*giggles* I'm sure that's true."

"Do you want to do it or do you want me to?"

"You can put it on me," she said with a smile.

"Okay," he said with a smile.

He turned to her and caressed her face until her ears, nose, and cheeks were covered with sunscreen. Then, he told her to turn around as he lathered her shoulders, back, and stomach.

"Um..."

"What?"

"Well, do you want to do your chest, or...?"

"No, it's fine. You can do it."

"Are you sure?"

"Yeah, Mike, it's fine. *chuckles* You're so cute when you're nervous."

smiles

"Can I do you now?" she asked, holding the bottle up in her hand.

"Yeah, sure!"

While at the pool, they played many games, until El realized that she hadn't told her dad where she was. So, she got out of the pool to call him from a pay phone.

"You have any cash on you?" she asked Mike.

"Yeah, how much do you need?"

"Just a quarter probably."

"Here you go."

"Thanks! *kisses cheek*"

"Wait, do you wanna come to my house afterward? I was thinking we could watch Grease together."

"Yeah, sure. I'll let him know."

Once Mike saw that she was on the way back to the pool, he decided to splash her with water.

splashes

"Oh, you little...I'm gonna kick your ass, Mike Wheeler...I mean it this time!" she said, sitting by the edge of the pool with her legs dangling in the water.

"Oh, I'd believe it even if it weren't true!"

smiles

"I would never question those terrifyingly beautiful, brown eyes..." he said, pulling her into the water with him by her legs.

blushes

He caught her in his arms and she wrapped her legs around his waist as they made out for several minutes.

Later on, they sat by the poolside and had some pizza before leaving.

"So, what's Grease about?"

"It's a musical about this guy and girl that meet at the beach over the summer but end up going to the same high school. It's a love story basically, that takes place in the '50s."

"Sounds cool."

"Yeah, it is. I think you'll like it, well, besides the occasional sexism."

"*laughs* Well, we should probably start heading out then."

"Yeah, let's go."

Back at home, every time Mike tried to touch El, she winced in pain.

"You okay?"

"Yeah, I'm just tender."

"Where?"

"I don't know. On my back and shoulders, I guess."

"Here, follow me," he said, taking her to his room.

"Can you lift up your shirt? You don't have to take it off, I was just going to check and see if you were sunburned."

"Yeah, sure."

"I knew it! How could that be? I put sunscreen on you!"

"I don't know...Maybe it washed off in the pool."

"Did you not reapply it?"

"No..."

"Well, that's my fault. I forgot to remind you."

"Mike, don't blame yourself. I should've remembered."

"Do you want me to put some aloe on you?"

"Aloe?"

"Yeah, aloe. It'll feel nice and cool on your sunburn. It's supposed to help."

"Okay, sure."

"Let me run and get it real quick."

When he came back, he had her lie down on his bed, her back turned to him as he rubbed aloe all over her shoulders and back.

"Whoa, you're so tense!" he said.

"You're right, this does feel good."

"Glad to hear it."

Then, he left her back in a trail of kisses, causing her to feel all tingly inside. In reaction, she turned around and pulled him towards her, kissing him with tongue.

"What was that about?" he asked.

"Just wanted to."

"Okay then," he said, happily.

She tied her bathing suit back in place and put her shirt back on as they went back downstairs and watched the movie.

"That's Olivia Newton-John?" asked El.

"Yep!"

"Wow..."

"You remember when they played Twist of Fate at the Snow Ball?"

"No..."

"Really?"

"I mean, I know the song, but they didn't play that, at least not when I was there."

"Oh, must've been before you got there," he said kind of sadly.

"Hey," she said, grabbing his arm.

"Yeah?"

"I'm really sorry that I wasn't there sooner."

"El, that was so long ago. And besides, I'm just glad you showed up at all!"

"I am too."

At the end, he said:

"You know, the way that Sandy's wardrobe changed was kind of just like how yours did when you came back from Pittsburgh."

"Haha, you're right. It's like from school girl to bad, biker chick."

"Exactly!"

laughs

"I liked both of them though. That's the difference. You don't have to change for me, El. Ever."

"That's why I love you, Mike. You like people just the way they are and you're unconditionally kind...You're...perfect." she said, running her fingers through his hair.

"*smiles* I was thinking just the same about you."

snuggles

29. You Make My Heart Sing

Hey, guys! Surprise! Here's a second chapter for you to enjoy this weekend. I wrote this one a while back but never finished editing it until today because I wrote in this part about her locket before actually writing a chapter with her receiving it. Now that that's out of the way, I can finally post it! Happy reading, everyone!

One day, Mike biked over to El's to take her out on a date, but she didn't time it right. She had had trouble getting out of bed that morning, and by the time Mike showed up, she was still in the shower. As he knocked on the door, he heard her voice coming from the inside and wondered why she wasn't answering. After waiting patiently for several minutes, he finally resorted to using the key under the mat to open the door.

"EL?" he half yelled.

It soon became clear that what Mike had heard earlier was El singing. Knowing that and hearing the sound of water running, he gathered that she was probably still in the shower. He considered knocking on the bathroom door but didn't want to rush her, so he just stayed put and listened, admiring her lovely singing voice as he bent down to pick up and pet Eggo. Mike liked the person that she was when she was with him, hell, he even *loved* the person she was when she was with him, but there was something he loved about walking in on the moments where she could just be herself without anyone else around. He stood there impressed, so captivated by her talent, a talent that she hadn't yet discovered herself. Hearing the sound of her beautiful voice was enough to feel her presence. He could listen to it all day long. Mike's intimate jam session was briefly interrupted by the sound of the running water suddenly getting cut off, but the sweet tunes soon picked back up as she dried off, wrapped a towel around herself, and walked out the door.

"Hey! I didn't know that you sang..." he said.

"Jesus, Mike! You scared the shit out of me!"

"Sorry!"

"I nearly dropped my towel!"

"Dammit! So close!" he said.

"Mi-ike!"

"What? I was only partly kidding!" he said with a wink.

"Of course you were!"

"What? You don't believe me? Well, I guess I'll just have to...*begins to tickle* tickle it out of you then!"

As she dodged his tickles, flinching around and trying to peel his fingers off of her, she could feel her towel slowly starting to loosen. She panicked and curled up into a little ball on the floor, but that didn't stop him.

"*chuckles* Mike! *giggles* Mike, stop! I can't breathe! *laughs hysterically*"

He examined the position they were in and stared into her deep brown eyes, falling in love with her all over again.

"Look, I know I'm the one who wanted to wait, and I still do, but right now I'm having the hardest time remembering why!"

"Oh, Mike!"

both stand up

"I can't help myself! You're just way too gorgeous..." he said, wrapping his arms around her waist.

smiles

He started to lean in to kiss her, but she stopped him and said:

"Wait, I'm wet."

"That's what she said!"

"Very funny! *chuckles* You and your dirty mind..." she said, making the 'shame-shame' finger gesture at him.

"I don't have a dirty mind, just a sexy imagination!"

"Oh brother!" she said, rolling her eyes.

"Hey, you're wearing the necklace I gave you! Did you forget to take it off before you showered?" he asked, lifting it from her collarbone and holding it up in between his fingers, then letting go.

"No, I just don't like to take it off. I love it too much to do that," she said, sliding the heart-shaped locket back and forth on the chain.

"I'm glad," he said with a smile.

"I am sorry though," she said.

"About what?" he asked.

"Not being ready when you came."

"No worries."

"You shouldn't have had to wait on me though!"

"Seriously, it's no big deal!"

"Let me get changed real quick and then I promise we'll go," she said, grabbing his hands.

"Okie dokie. You sure you don't want to wear that towel out? It's a good look for you!"

"Hah, you wish!"

Several minutes later, she came out, raiding her dad's secret stash of cash for a couple of bucks to spend.

"So, you're a soprano, huh?" Mike asked, bringing up her singing once again.

"Soprano?" she repeated.

"Yeah, if you sing soprano, it means that you sing high, then next to that is alto, which is a lower voice part. Females are usually sopranos and altos, whereas tenors and basses are the male equivalents of that. Some guys are baritones though, which means that they fall somewhere in between tenor and bass."

"Oh. Which do you sing?"

"Me? No, I don't sing."

"What do you mean you don't sing?"

"I mean, I can, but I'm not very good..."

"I'm sure that's not true! C'mon, sing something for me."

"What about our date?"

"Mike, we're going bowling. It's not like we have reservations or anything! We've got some time to kill."

"Fine...Let me just think of a song first."

"How about our song?" she suggested.

"That's a lot of pressure...What if I totally butcher it? I don't want to ruin it for you..."

"You could never ruin our song! You're the reason I love the song in the first place," she said.

"*smiles* And you're the reason why I'm going to sing it, but only if you sing the beginning. I'll sing the bridge."

"Deal!" she said.

She sat on the back of the couch and sang to him. As she sang, he was fighting the urge to dance with her, but when it came his time to sing the song, he couldn't resist.

He reached out and grabbed each of her hands, pulling her up. Once she was on her feet, he grabbed her right hand with his left and

placed his right hand on her waist, dancing with her as he sang the words, 'Since you've gone, I've been lost without a trace, I dream at night I can only see your face, I look around but it's you I can't replace, I feel so cold and I long for your embrace.' Then, he spun her around and dipped her on 'I keep crying baby, baby,' bringing her back to his face on the word 'please.'

The whole time he sang as they danced, El looked at him with smiling eyes, completely smitten. *Is there anything he can't do?* she thought to herself. The whole time, she was tempted to kiss him, but once he dipped her and brought her close to his face, the tension was too much and she couldn't hold out any longer.

She quickly scanned his face, up and down- eyes, lips, eyes, lips. Then, she leaned in and kissed him, her left hand on his hip, her right resting on the side of his neck, with his hands still wrapped around her back. Now, their lips were the ones dancing, playing, communicating. Her kiss was screaming *I need you now* and he responded with one that said *Here I am*. Then, El bit his lip, taking him by surprise.

"Are you going to do that every time I sing 'cause I could sure get used to this!"

"Haha, only if you ask nicely."

"I'll beg on my hands and knees if I have to."

"*laughs* So, you're a soprano too, aren't you?" she asked, jokingly.

"*chortles* You caught me, I'm a soprano!"

"I had a feeling! *laughs, pauses to think* You're a...baritone?"

"Yeah. I used to be a tenor, but my voice got lower within the past two years."

"I know! I remember how your voice used to crack when I first met you. It was so cute! It's so much deeper now. It sounds really hot!"

"You think so?"

"Yeah, definitely. You're a good singer though, Mike, truly! I don't know why you try to hide it. I swear, sometimes you're way too humble!"

"Thanks! Well, I'm much better at harmonizing than I am at singing myself, but that means a lot coming from you. You're amazing!"

"What's harmonizing?"

"Have you ever listened to a song and heard like more than one voice but all the voices are singing the same words?"

"Yeah."

"You know how it sounds different than the melody that the main singer is singing, yet oddly kind of goes perfectly with it and makes this rounded, complete sound?"

"I think I know what you mean, but give me an example."

"*pauses to think* Bohemian Rhapsody."

"Bohemian Rhapsody?"

"You've got to be kidding me! You've never heard Bohemian Rhapsody?!"

"No...What's that?"

"Only the greatest song ever made!"

"That's it, I'm taking you to the record store!" he continued.

"But what about the bowling alley?"

"We'll go after we bowl, that way we can listen to it when I take you back home."

"Okay!"

Once at the bowling alley, they each switched out their regular shoes for their bowling shoes and picked out their bowling balls. Mike suggested that she try a lighter, smaller one first, just to get used to it

and have more control over the ball. She took a deep breath before rolling the ball for the first time and said:

"Here goes nothing!"

Mike noticed that she kept getting gutterballs and decided to help her out.

"So, you just kind of line your ball up with where you see the pins in front of you," he said, reaching over her shoulders to guide the ball with her, "and then you just swing your arm back and forward, like this," he said without actually rolling the ball onto the lane.

"Now you try!" he said.

"Okay."

She gave it a try and knocked about 6 down.

"That was really good!"

"Thanks, I think I kinda got the hang of it now."

She got a couple of strikes every now and then, but Mike was even more proud when she got her first split!

"Holy shit, El! You got a split!"

"I did?"

"Yeah! Look at your score!"

"Wait, does this mean, I won?"

"Yes, you won!"

"Oh my god!"

"I say this calls for a celebration! Pick anything on the menu, I'm buying."

Without hesitation, she said:

"Slushie!"

"Okay. Do you wanna split one?"

nods

"Which flavor? No, wait, let me guess...Blueberry!"

"How did you know?"

"That's what you got the last time we went to the movies."

"But you really just remembered that?"

"Yeah."

She smiled, finding his observantness adorable.

"I'll be right back. Just pick a table and I'll meet you there."

"Alright," she said.

He got the biggest slushie they sold and stuck two straws in it, walking around to see if he could find her. She waved him over.

"One slushie," he said like a waiter, setting it on the table.

"Thanks."

"I got us half and half, just to make it interesting."

"Half and half of what?"

"Blueberry and cherry."

"Oh cool! I didn't know that they made those."

"I didn't either! That's why I got it."

Only about 30 seconds had passed and El had already slurped down so much so fast.

"Uh oh...Brain freeze!" she said.

"*laughs* Your face looks cute when it's all puckered up. It looks like a raisin!"

"Eww, raisins are gross..." she said.

"You're right, raisins *are* gross," he said.

She stopped sipping for a while. Mike then asked:

"Full already?"

"Yeah, weird, right?" she asked.

"*Right*..." he said sarcastically.

"Do you mind if I have the rest?" he continued.

"No, go for it!"

"Thanks," he said, taking a slurp of what was left.

He then set the cup back down, revealing his ruby red lips.

"*laughs* It looks like you're wearing lipstick!"

"Oh, haha!" he said, wiping his mouth with a napkin.

"Wait, stick out your tongue!" he said.

"Why?" she asked.

"Just trust me," he said.

sticks out

"Yep, just as I suspected."

"What was the point of that?" she asked.

"Your tongue's blue!"

"Oh, haha. Let me see yours!"

sticks out

She moved closer to him as if she was inspecting the color on his tongue, but really, she was just leaning in to kiss him with *her* tongue.

"Is it purple now?" she asked, sticking it out.

"*giggles* Sorta, but not really. *pauses* Maybe you just didn't do it right...Here, let me try," he said, leaning in.

He was perfect, simply perfect. One minute he was teaching her how to bowl, the next he was slurping a slushie with her, and the next thing she knew, they were making out.

"What kind of shirt is this?" she asked, pulling away from the kiss, holding a pinch of the fabric between her fingers.

"It's a bowling shirt."

"It's soft," she said, rubbing the lining of the sleeve.

"What's this?" he asked, pointing to a spot at the top of her chest.

She looked down and he flicked her chin up.

"*giggles* What are you, *eight*?" she said.

"What can I say, I'm a kid at heart!"

"How is she by the way?" he asked.

"Who are you talking about?" asked El.

"Kali. Have you checked in with her at all since you left Pittsburgh?"

"Yeah, I have a few times. Not much has changed though. It's like I was never there!" she said.

"Oh, don't say that! You know she loves you, El."

"Yeah, but not enough to give up her vengeful heists..."

"*holds hands* Maybe I shouldn't have brought it up, I just want to make sure you're doing okay. I know it must've been hard for you to say goodbye to her so soon."

"It was, but not nearly as hard as it was to say goodbye to you."

"That was the best and worst day of my life when you said goodbye to me," he said.

"What made it the best?"

"Our first kiss."

He reached a hand in her direction, moving the hair away from her face out of endearment, then placing it on her cheek, which he rubbed with his thumb. She held the hand on her face and looked at him with glassy eyes. He leaned over the table and kissed her forehead, saying:

"I love you."

"I love you more," she said.

"Not possible," he said.

"Anything's possible when we're together," she said.

smiles

"Well, are you ready?" he asked.

"Ready for what?" she asked.

"To have your mind blown by the gods of rock, of course!"

"*laughs* I sure am!" she said, returning her ball and bowling shoes before they left for the record store.

There was only one record store in all of Hawkins and it was always busy. It was called The Gold Standard. They had everything from Billie Holiday to Bon Jovi!

Once they got there, she looked around the room in awe. She had

never been to the record store before. Jim Croce, Madonna, Joan Jett & The Blackhearts, The Police- All of her favorite music in one place. She couldn't believe it! She came in holding Mike's hand and came out holding 5 records. Two of them were the actual ones they intended to buy in the first place, A Night At the Opera and Greatest Hits (1981) by Queen. The others were just for El, well, and Hopper of course.

"Fleetwood Mac. That's an interesting choice!" said Mike.

"Oh yeah. I just saw this Live In Boston vinyl with the other new arrivals and thought my dad might want it. He likes them a lot."

"He's gonna love that."

"Have you heard it?"

"No. My mom's music taste consists of more ballad and pop songs than rock. She listens to a lot of Barbra Streisand and Donna Summer. My dad listens to pretty much anything as long as it's not country or metal."

"Ah, gotcha."

"What else did you get?" he asked.

"Like A Virgin-"

"A classic!"

"*giggles* And Bad Reputation."

"You like Joan Jett & The Blackhearts?"

"Hell yeah! They're so bitchin'."

"Yeah, they are pretty badass..." he said, examining the record.

"I first heard them when I was with Kali and her gang, but Max likes them a lot, so we've listened to them at her house a couple of times."

"Why am I not surprised! *laughs* Well, I got you the album with

Bohemian Rhapsody on it and another album with a bunch of Queen's greatest hits. I think you'll really like it."

"Aww, Mike...You're so thoughtful! *looks down at records and smiles, looks up at him and squints eyes* Are you spoiling me again?"

"Maybe..."

She kissed his cheek and he threw his arm around her. Once they had each paid for their stack of records, they headed back home.

unlocks latches, opens door

"*This* is Queen," Mike said as he placed the vinyl on the turntable and set the stylus against it.

El was blown away. She had never heard anything like it. It was so unique, like her.

"It's really pretty," she whispered.

nods and smiles

She giggled as Mike air-guitared Brian May's solo and shot him a funny look once it got to the third verse, chuckling when it got to the "Galileo" part. She laughed as he mouthed each and every word.

"Whoa! That part was so high! Oh my god!" she squealed, referring to the part where Freddie Mercury sang the last "for me."

He paused it for a moment, lifting the arm first, then stopping the turntable.

"Do you think you could hit that note?" he asked.

"Maybe...I'd have to hear it again."

"You're gonna love this next part," he said, continuing to play it.

They then nodded their heads to the wicked rock music that came after and swayed to the last bits of piano at the end.

"That was totally sick!" she said.

"I told you you'd love it!"

"Let's listen to it again!"

"*laughs* Okay!"

They listened to it once more, with El attempting the high note this time.

"Holy shit! You did it!" he said excitedly, picking her up and hugging her.

They listened to more music and later sang together for the first time.

"Okay, sing something and I'll harmonize with you."

"Okay, um...I've played I'll Have To Say I Love You In A Song before, right? Do you that one well enough?"

He rolled his eyes around the room and mouthed the words as he tried to remember how it went, then nodded.

"Yeah, that's a good one actually. Let's do that."

She shyly began singing the first verse and he sang along with her. There is simply no better feeling than harmonizing in song with the one you love. It gave her goosebumps, just looking in his eyes and singing with him, knowing that every word they sang to and with each other was true to them. She loved him so much, she couldn't contain her joy.

It was really something to watch El's default shyness blossom into confidence as they sang together. He looked at her with endearment, moving a little closer with each line. She could feel her voice blending perfectly with his and melting into one full sound. It was then when she knew that she and Mike had something special, a harmonious bond.

"All that biking, bowling, and singing...You must be pretty exhausted. Why don't you take a load off and stay a little while longer?" she said, grabbing ahold of his sleeve as he got up.

"Tempting, and believe me, I would love to, but I should really get going. I'm sorry!"

"It's okay," she said, kissing him abruptly, "See you around."

He leaned in to kiss her once again before leaving but was interrupted by Hopper, who had just walked through the door. It startled both of them and they immediately turned to him, awkwardly clearing their throats.

"I'll see you later, El," he said rubbing her wrist.

"Bye, son," said Hopper.

"Goodnight, sir."

Once Mike left, Hopper then picked El up and spun her around, kissing the top of her head. He used to do this with Sarah too, but as they say, old habits die hard.

"*giggles* What was that for?" she asked.

"I don't know, I've just missed you. I've been working so many late nights this week, I feel like I've barely seen you at all!"

"Well, I'm glad things have calmed down at work now."

"I am too. So, how was your date with that Wheeler boy?"

"*chuckles* You mean, Mike? *pauses* It was great! We went to the bowling alley and bought some records."

"Nice! Can I see 'em?"

"Sure. I stuck them by the turntable."

"How many records did you buy?!"

"Well, Mike bought the Queen ones. I bought the Joan Jett one myself and-"

"Like A Virgin. What the hell is this?" he asked.

"Madonna, silly!"

"Jesus...Okay, from now on I want you to run some of these past me before you go on and buy them. Understand?"

"Fine, but everybody listens to Madonna, Dad!"

"That may be, but how much money did all of this cost? I mean, you went to the bowling alley and then the record store. I just don't understand how you paid for all of this because I *know* that you wouldn't take more money than you were supposed to from your ol' pa, now would ya?"

"Mike covered the cost of the bowling alley. I only took like \$20 from the stash and I spent just about that much. They were on sale."

"But if they were on sale, two records shouldn't cost \$20."

"I didn't buy two, I bought three. I got you a live Fleetwood Mac album. It's brand new, it just came out in February!"

"Aww, c'mere you!" he said, hugging her.

"Thanks, kid. That was very thoughtful," he continued.

"You're welcome!" she said, letting go and walking away.

"Hey, wait!" he said.

"Yeah?" she asked.

"What do you say we crack this baby open?"

"Yeah, I'd like that," she said.

And so, they lit the fireplace and listened through the whole record as they sat side by side on the couch, missing these father-daughter moments that they shared.

30. There's Always Room For You, Love

Hi guys! 🙌 Wanted to start this chapter off with a quote:

"Oh, what lies there are in kisses." ~Heinrich Heine

Based on the quote alone, you can probably infer that there's a lot of kissing and making out in this one, but it's still all fluff, none of "the nasty." It's *way* too early and they're *way* too young for that stuff!

Hope this is everything you've been wanting and more. So sorry for the long wait! I recently went to prom and next thing I knew, it was spring break and I just wasn't really in the mood to crank out any chapters, though I do have many ideas for some new ones. I've already started writing this one really big chapter (it may end up being a two-parter, but we'll see) that I'm probably going to conclude this story with once I finish writing the chapters that precede it. Without giving too much away, one of the last ones is going to be a crossover/multifandom chapter and I have this really good feeling that you guys are going to totally LOVE it! Feel free to mention this story to a friend...I could always use more wonderful readers like you!

P.S. For those of you who've seen the trailer for the new season of ST and stopped & stared at the one frame of Mike & El kissing for a hot minute, that is supposedly what her bedroom is supposed to look like in season 3 and people have zoomed in to find that Rory is indeed on her dresser, so this was my inspiration for this chapter. Without further ado, enjoy! :)

One morning, El was sound asleep after having stayed up super late the night before. She and Mike had talked for hours on end, having trouble hanging up, as they missed each other so. Dreams of him filled her head that night, but one dream stuck out to her even more than most. In this particular dream, Mike was in her bedroom but her bedroom wasn't her bedroom. It looked different. It *was* different. She had given it a makeover. It had new covers, pillows- even the color was different (almost a sage green). She wished it always looked like that, but Mike was there and she showed him around in her new

room. Once they got to her bed, they got all charged up and started kissing.

Meanwhile, as El dreamt of a sweet Mike kissing her face, another sweet creature scurried through her room- Her dog, Eggo. After just having greeted Hopper, Eggo ran straight to El's door, pushing it open with her nose. As Hopper started to see her running in that direction, he bolted after her, cursing under his breath, but she escaped from his arms, pouncing onto the bed to find a sleeping El. Eggo then climbed up beside her face, licking it all over with wet kisses.

"*mumbles* Hehe, *Mi-ike*..." she giggled.

"Mike, stop...It *tickles*," she continued.

Hopper didn't know whether to laugh or be concerned. What were those kids doing in her head?

This went on for a couple more seconds until El slowly started to wake up.

"*holds up dog* You're not Mike..." she said.

"Nope," said Hopper.

"How much of that did you see?" she asked.

"Enough," he said.

"Well, this is embarrassing..."

"*chuckles* You'll get over it. C'mon, let's eat breakfast now, shall we?"

"Alright," she said.

Over coffee and actual eggos, El discussed redecorating her room with Hopper.

"Hey, Dad?"

"Yeah?" he responded with a mouthful.

"I know that I ask a lot of you, but I was hoping, well, maybe we could redecorate my room...?"

"What's wrong with the way it looks now?"

El raised her eyebrows, her eyes widening as she leaned toward him, concerned that he seriously didn't see what was wrong with it.

"Okay, a lot of things," he answered for her.

"*sighs* Well, I guess it is about time that you have a grown-up girl's room..."

"Really? So, we can do it?" she asked.

"I don't see why not!"

"Aww, thank you, Dad!" she said, hugging him.

"*pats back* Sure thing, kid, sure thing. *pulls away* It'll be nice to spend some time together when we fix it up, huh?"

nods

[Time Jump: 3 weeks later]

Not long after that, Mike came over, the first person to see her new and improved bedroom after weeks of decorating.

It hadn't been a big deal when El was in Mike's room since she had once lived in his house and had been in it many a time, but Mike being in El's room wasn't quite as common. You see, Hopper liked to have the two of them right where he could see them if he could help it.

"Whoa! This is your room?" he asked.

"Yeah, *chuckles* you know you've been in it before, right?"

"Yeah, I know, but it just looks so-"

"Different?" she asked.

"Yeah, different."

"Well, I should hope so! I only spent three weeks decorating it!"

"It looks great!"

"Thanks!"

Mike walked around and took a look at everything, from El's dresser to her closet, to her bed itself.

She showed him around, picking up the different things that she had and wanted to show him, some of them being things that he had given her. It reminded Mike of when he had given El a house tour and had introduced her to all of the different things in his room and basement. There was nothing more adorable to him than when El copied him or picked up something that he had taught her to do.

"*smiles* You put our Snow Ball pictures in here?!" he asked, picking them up.

"Yep! I love them. They make me feel at home."

smiles and blushes

He thought back to when he first showed her Rory and after having talked to her over the phone about decorating her room, he decided it was about time that she had him. He thought she might like to have it in her room, as a little memento of their first days together, so he brought it with him.

"Hey, I got you a little something," he said.

"Oh, Mike, you're always getting me gifts!"

"I don't know if you'll remember this, but-"

"*unravels present, gasps* Rory!" she exclaimed.

"Oh, so you do?"

"Of course I do! *smiles at toy, looks at him* I love it! *hugs* Thank

you."

"You're welcome."

She loved the feeling of hugging him just about as much as she did talking with him. It was so warm and comforting.

"So, what now?" she asked.

"Oh, I have a couple of ideas," said Mike.

El sat on the bed, patting beside her.

"New bed?" he asked.

"*chortles* Yep, what gave it away, the size?"

"Yeah, it's huge."

He continued to stand there awkwardly, not moving an inch.

"Look who's suddenly shy," she said. "Here, I'll make it easier for you."

grabs hands, pulls beside

"Well?" she asked.

raises and furrows eyebrows in confusion

"Aren't you gonna kiss me or something?" she continued.

"Well, I was, but-"

"You know, if you didn't want to kiss me, you should've just said so," she said, closing herself off from him and letting go of his hands.

"Hey, hey, hey! I didn't mean it like that..." he said.

"Then what did you mean it like, Mike? Because lately, it sure seems like you don't want to anym-"

In that moment, Mike grabbed ahold of her hands and interrupted her with a tender kiss, letting her know that she was being heard and

that he did truly care about her. In fact, he more than just cared for her. He loved her.

He slowly pulled away and looked at her for validation, similarly to how he did when they first kissed, as the sudden outburst of affection was quite the spitting image.

Processing what had just happened, El looked down at their hands as she rubbed his with her thumbs, then back at his eyes and slowly started to smile.

"Guess I was wrong...Who knew it would feel so right to be wrong!" she said.

Mike smiles

Then, she said:

"You know, I had a dream a while ago that you were in here with me..."

"Oh, you did now?" he asked, scooting closer.

"I did. That's actually kind of the reason why I redecorated it in the first place because it looked a little like this in my dream."

"What were we doing in the dream?"

In that moment, El looked up from their hands, into Mike's eyes, then down at his lips, biting her own as she contemplated what she was about to do. El was someone who felt lost without people. All she ever knew was what it felt like to be alone and she was ready to explore the world of family, friendship, and most importantly, love. But alas, Mike was there and that chronic feeling of loneliness seemed to have vanished completely. With a racing heart and hands that couldn't be kept to themselves, she leaned in and kissed him. Then, they each pulled away with a light smack.

"Huh! So, dreams do come true!" Mike joked.

He looked at her, his eyes moving up and down rapidly with excitement and eagerness. His lips then enclosed on hers, finding a

certain rhythm with her own. Not fully knowing what they were getting into, their lips approached each other with caution and stopped. Both of their top lips fell onto the surface of the bottom lip and puckered on top of each other's. They both pressed their lips against each other so tightly, that the feeling of the kiss itself was imprinted in their minds even when their lips were no longer touching.

As the tension started to build, El stuck her neck away from her shoulders and leaned into Mike, letting her lips fully puff out against his. The pressure was enough that it temporarily drew them away from one another, but it wasn't long until they both came back for more.

And with that, Mike felt El's chin slowly start to escape from the crescent of his. His left brow then nudged hers, forming a keyhole shape between each of their eyes as her forehead rocked off of his. Their mouths then flattened and released each other, relaxing for a split second without either of the curve of their lips parting. Their hands pawed at each other and continued to pull each other in for more. Mike opened his mouth, leaning into El as her chin again came knocking into his. Her upper lip then slid beneath his nostril as their tongues lazily met in the middle. El then began to lie on her back and Mike hovered over her, now both horizontal and closer than ever. And in *that* moment, their impatient lips grabbed onto each other hungrily with an insistence on remaining right where they were.

Noticing a closed door, Hopper burst into the room with a disappointed and angry look on his face.

"Hey, what'd we talk about with bedroom doors?"

"They stay open at all times..." El mumbled angrily.

"If you so much as lay a finger on my daughter, I will end you. You got that?" Hopper said, waving his finger at Mike.

"*gulps, voice cracks* Yes, sir."

"Good. Well, guess that does it. I should be back home in about 20 minutes. Just have to run an errand real quick."

"Would that errand happen to be at Melvald's?" El asked as a matter-of-factly.

"No comment."

"SAY HI TO JOYCE FOR ME!" she yelled as he started to close the door and walk away.

El giggles

"Hey, he forgot to leave the door open! You know what that means..." said Mike.

"I sure do!" said El.

both kiss

Hopper opens door back up

"Nice try, distracting me like that...I've got my eye on you, Wheeler," he said.

exits room without closing door

"What'd *I* do?" he asked El once Hopper left, similarly to how his own father had once asked his mother at dinner.

"You fell in love with me, that's what."

"Oh, I guess you're right...Now, where were we? *grabs chin*" he asked, smiling, as they both leaned in once again.

Hopper peeps around doorframe, clears throat

"*scoffs* May we help you?" El asked, aggravated.

"No, but hey, leave a little room for Jesus, will ya?"

The moment they knew Hopper was there, they immediately separated from each other as far as they could, but when he left, their heads slowly drew nearer, falling atop each other in a sudden burst of laughter.

Once the laughing ceased, Mike said:

"Alone at last!"

"What about my dad?"

"He doesn't scare me, well, at least when he's not actually in the room with us he doesn't."

"*chuckles* What does? Scare you, I mean."

"You. Wonderful, daunting you," he said, rubbing her chin.

"Oh," she said with a smile.

kisses

As it got later, Mike decided that it was best for him to go home.

"Mike," she said, grasping onto his shirtsleeve.

"Yeah?"

"Don't leave me, not like this."

"Like what?"

"Alone, here, with my thoughts."

"What kind of thoughts exactly?"

"The ones that make me do this," she said, aggressively pulling his face toward hers as he fell onto the bed with her.

"*exhales* Glad I asked..."

"So, does this mean you'll stay?"

"Yes!"

"Okay grea-"

"On one condition," he finished.

"What's that?"

"Less talking more kissing."

"You have yourself a deal, Wheeler... *chuckles* I mean *kisses*"

31. I Hear Wedding Bells

[Flashback to the beginning of May]

On one chilly spring evening, the lovely El Hopper sat by her bed, with her sweet dog, Eggo, and a phone in her hand. She dialed her favorite number other than her own name, and that number was her boyfriend's.

"Hello?" he asked.

"Hey there, handsome..."

"Hey there, gorgeous..."

"*smiles* What's up?"

"Nothing much. Just about to go shopping with my mom. I'm glad that you called actually," he said.

"Oh? And why might that be?"

"Well, my mom's kind of making me do this thing called cotillion because my cousin's getting married in a month. It's basically these classes where you learn how to ballroom dance and table manners and all of that. It's every Wednesday this month and you have to get all dressed up and stuff, but it might be kind of fun. I was wondering if maybe you wanted to take it with me. The reason I'm asking is that I just don't feel right about dancing with other girls if one of those girls isn't you."

"Aww, Mike...That's so sweet! Of course, I'll do it with you."

"Really? Aww, El, that's great!"

"I'm excited. I love dressing up...And dancing!"

"I know you do," he said, giggling.

[Late June]

El had seen the movies. She knew how it went, how when two people are in love, they get married, but she had never actually been to a wedding herself. This was her first wedding and she was so looking forward to it, even more so than Mike.

They filed into the pew, sitting side by side with their fingers intertwined. El whispered in his ear:

"When is the bride coming out?"

"Soon, I promise," he said patting her leg.

El watched in awe as the bride came out. She thought she looked absolutely beautiful and loved her dress. In fact, she was so captivated by her beauty that she forgot she was supposed to stand up, so Mike pulled her up by the hand, wrapping his arms around her waist as he rested his chin against her shoulder.

"Doesn't she look beautiful?" El whispered.

"Not as beautiful as you would look in that dress," he said.

"*smiles* You really mean that?" she asked.

"I really do, and frankly, I'd marry you tomorrow if I had any control over it."

smiles

As she watched them exchange their vows, a tear rolled down her face, but not because she was touched by the moment but because she was touched by the truth it held for her existing relationship. As Mike listened to these words, he gazed over at El for what felt like an eternity. He caught her eye and she turned her head in his direction, now locking eyes with him. He looked at her with a stare of sincerity, one that had a certain seriousness to it, yet was also a look of endearment. His deep brown eyes were so brutally honest that they made his feelings blatantly obvious. Through one look at his eyes, El could tell everything he was thinking. It was almost as if he was saying these very words to El herself.

Though they were just kids when they fell in love and only teens

right then, this moment held meaning for them, as it was almost as if they exchanged these vows with their eyes through smiles and rolling tears. They made a promise with their eyes. In that promise, they vowed that someday that would be them. It was almost as if they were the couple up there saying all those wonderful things in that very moment. And this promise they made was almost as binding as the rings that would soon appear on the couple's fingers and as real as the ground beneath their feet.

Soon that look of seriousness turned into a cheerful grin, her head falling onto his shoulder in comfort. He turned his cheek to the top of her head and kissed it, throwing his arm around her.

Though they got together in junior high, this was not your typical middle school day-long, drama-filled relationship. Even though it was both of their first times being in love and in a relationship, this wasn't a "first love" relationship because that implies that it will eventually end for good, but they were long-term. While normally this would seem incredibly unrealistic that two teens like themselves would start a never-ending relationship in middle school, it was true for them because they weren't your normal couple. It was clear from the beginning that they were destined to be together, meant for each other if you will. There was no denying it. It's not every day that a cute girl with a shaved head gets lost in the woods and is found by a sweet boy, who then takes her in and befriends her.

As they ate dinner, she brought it up into conversation again, their future. She couldn't help herself! As she looked at the couple, she felt nothing but love for her boyfriend.

"You think that'll be us someday?" she asked him.

"I know it will be."

"So, you have thought about it before!"

"Thought about what?"

"About what it would be like if we got married."

"What? No, of course not!"

"Really?" she asked with a tone that suggested she knew he was lying.

"Okay, maybe a little."

El raises eyebrows

"Okay, a lot! I've thought about it...a lot."

"I knew it!"

"Have you?" he asked.

"Of course I have! How could I not? I mean, it's you..." said El.

smiles

holds sides of face

kisses

"I've thought a lot about what it would be like to be married to you. I mean, we've been together so long, it kind of already feels like we are sometimes, but still- Waking up next to you every day, I couldn't think of anything better," said Mike.

leans forehead against his

"Tell me more," she said sweetly, in a captivated manor.

"Well, we'll both go to college beforehand and have already landed our first jobs."

"And what do you think I'll do?"

"Well, that's not up to me, it's up to you, but if I had to guess, I'd say you'd run a home for troubled youth or be a veterinarian or something like that. I don't know, just something as nurturing as you are. But I think you'd also make a good artist of some sort, maybe you'd take a liking to writing or something. I think you have a lot to say about the world and life in general. Yours is a perspective that I'd like to hear and that I think a lot of other people would too."

"Awww, that means so much to me!"

"What about me?"

"Hmm...I'd have to say...a scientist, but not the bad kind, not the kind I grew up around. The good kind. The kind that protests human and animal testing, but instead finds new and innovative ways to test out experiments. Ooh, or a politician. You'd make a great leader!"

"You really think so?"

"Yeah, I really do. You're fair and you're a great listener. You're also a great teacher and you take care of people and genuinely care about them. If that's not comforting, I don't know what is!"

"You're the sweetest..."

"So then what happens?"

"Well, I guess we'd move in together first and then at some point I would propose to you."

"Whoa, whoa, who said I wasn't proposing?"

"Well, no one, I guess I just thought I would because I'm such a planner."

"Okay, just checking..."

"And if all went according to plan, you'd say yes and then we'd get married that following year. It would be a small wedding I imagine. Just our closest friends and family, but enough for it to feel like no one's missing that shouldn't be."

"And where would it be?"

"Where we met, in the woods, well, the ceremony would at least. Knowing my mom, she would probably string lights among the trees to give it a more festive feel. Then, the ceremony would be at the school, where we shared our first kiss."

"Sounds...perfect!"

"I'm glad you think so."

"And what happens after?"

"Well, then we'd go on our honeymoon, to some country far from here. We'd check into the hotel and go upstairs. I'd carry you through the door and then maybe we'd...ya know, **whispers** fool around a little bit."

"Uh huh," she said, leaning forward, her hand resting on her face, her elbow on the table.

whispers And we'll start by making out. Then, I'd take off your clothes and you'd take off mine and we'd lay down and I'd kiss you all over and you'd touch me and I'd touch you. It'll be really romantic. Like something that we were supposed to do our whole lives."

"Wow..."

"Yeah, guess I got a little carried away there, huh?"

"No, no, it was nice. Really painted a picture."

"And someday, we'd do it again, but without anything holding us back and we'd make a baby. And we won't care about whether it has powers or not, we'll just love it because it'll be ours."

"I can't wait."

"Me neither."

sighs Well, what do you say we apply what we learned in cotillion out on the dance floor?"

"I thought you'd never ask..."

He took her out to the dance floor and placed her hand in his. They danced to the music and as it got later, the music got slower and more romantic. He took the hand that was holding his and placed it on his other shoulder. Then, he threw his arms around her waist and held her in a close embrace, taking the time to admire how good she looked in her teal, linen strapless dress. It highlighted her smooth, beautiful shoulders perfectly, making her locket the point of focus. It was embroidered with cream-colored flowers all along the front of it,

leading to the mint green ruffles at the bottom of her skirt. It fit her like a glove, matching the curvature of hips almost exactly.

They each danced, cheek-to-cheek until their faces met in the middle. El looked at him with endearment and combed through his bangs with her fingers. Then, she leaned towards his face and kissed him, knowing that he was all she needed. And that was enough, for now...

32. Boys Will Be Boys

It was all planned out. Mike and El had made reservations to go out to dinner at a nice restaurant just for the hell of it. Sitting at a table with her lovely dress on, she waited for him to come. 15 minutes had passed and she assumed he was just late, then 30 and she started to worry, then an hour and she knew something was wrong. Only a little after an hour, the waiter came up to her and nicely asked her to give up her seat. She called her dad and he came to get her. She was hurt and confused.

The next day, she debated over calling him versus letting him call her and apologize. She decided to wait. She didn't owe him anything. Instead, she called Max.

"Mike stood me up last night. We made reservations and everything..." she revealed.

"Shit, seriously?"

"Yeah..."

"What a dick move. I'm really sorry, El. I'm sure he had a good reason for it."

"Well, then he should've just said so!"

"True. Well, Lucas pissed me off too, so how 'bout we hang out today? We could go to the zoo and get ice cream."

"I've always wanted to go to the zoo! How'd you know?"

"I hear things..."

"That sounds great."

"Sweet! I'll pick you up at 1:30."

"Sounds good. Thanks again, Max."

"It's nothing. See you in a bit!"

"Bye!"

Not long after that, the phone rang.

rings

picks up

"Hello?" she said.

"Hey, it's me."

"Hey."

long pause

"*sighs* Look, I can explain."

"Explain what? Why you didn't show up last night?"

"Yeah, that...*sighs* I was playing Zork and I just got so caught up in trying to get to the next level, that I was already running late and then after a while, I just figured there was no point in showing up if I was already going to be that late."

"And it didn't occur to you to call?"

"No, it did, but I just *sighs* I don't know, I-I messed up."

"Yeah, clearly you did."

"El, I'm so sorry! It won't happen again, I promise."

"Save your promises for later. It already happened. How can I know that it won't happen again?"

"Because you know me. I would never ditch you on purpose, I'm not that guy!"

"Whatever..."

"El, I'm sorry."

"You know, Mike, I know that we ditch our friends sometimes to be together, but I never thought that you'd be the one to ditch me. So just fuck off, okay?"

"El, please! Let's just hang out today, I promise I'll make it up to you."

"Stop saying that, promising me things when you don't know if you can keep them. Besides, I'm hanging out with Max today, so I can't."

"Okay, well, I love you."

hangs up

It was the first time he had said it and she hadn't said it back. It stung a little, a lot more than he thought it would.

rings

picks up

"Hey, Lucas. Wanna hang out today?"

"We haven't hung out in a while...What is this really about, Mike?"

"Fine. I blew off El to play Zork and now she's ditching me."

"And why is that my problem?"

"Because Max is ditching you too, to hang out with El."

"Fair point. I pissed her off too."

"So, what do you say?"

"Sure, sounds like fun."

"Cool. My place, 2:00?"

"I'll be there."

"Sweet. See ya then."

"See ya."

As they hung out, everything bored them more than usual and video games most of all. Mike tried playing it with him, but it only made him feel worse.

"This is ass, man," said Mike.

"Yeah..." said Lucas.

"No offense, but I really wish you were El right now."

"No offense, but I really wish you were Max right now."

"Guess we really screwed up, didn't we?"

"Yeah, big time."

"*laughs* How pathetic are we?"

"Pretty damn pathetic..."

"Guess we should do something about it, huh?"

"Guess we should."

"Are you thinking what I'm thinking?"

"Go watch romcoms and eat our feelings?"

"What? No! I was thinking we could go get them both roses and wait on their doorstep until they come home."

"*scratches head* Oh, yeah, yeah that works too..." he said, embarrassed.

And they did just that. By the time El came home, Mike had already played out every scenario in his head, going over what he would say to her over and over again.

"Mike, what is this? What are you doing here?"

"I'm here because this week I hurt someone very important, someone very special to me, but not just someone, you. I'm the one who's supposed to protect you, but really you do most of the protecting on

your own. I try my best though and instead of doing that, I hurt you, and that wasn't fair. "

"Mike-

"*lifts finger to her lips* Shhhh, it's okay, I know you're mad. I would be too. I'm just so sorry. You know I would never hurt you on purpose! You mean everything to me, but you deserve better and if you never want to see me again, I'll respect that."

If it were any other person, El would assume that they were drunk or high right now, but not her Mike. No, Mike was always in his head when it came to this kind of stuff, so she knew that he was just scared of losing their relationship. At the end of the day, she still loved him, and she wasn't going to throw all of this away for one silly, stupid fight.

"Mike, it's o-

"Over, I know. It's fine, I understand...I'll go."

"No, Mike, not *over*. *Okay*. It's okay. That's all."

"It's *okay*?"

"Yeah, I'm over *it*, not *you*."

"But, I don't understand...I thought you were breaking up with me!"

"People make mistakes. I sure as hell have. I can't hate you for that."

"So, you didn't hate my 'I screwed up please take me back' speech?"

"No, of course not! You had me at hello..." she said, smiling, rubbing the side of his cheek.

His face changed to a look of relief and pure joy. He set the rose down and put his hand on top of the one holding his face, the other resting on the side of her neck, looking into her eyes as they both leaned in and kissed.

Once both of them pulled away, Mike took the flower and handed it

to her, saying:

"Here, I think you forgot a little something."

"*smiles* It's beautiful *sniffs* and it smells great too! I'll put it in a vase once we get inside."

Once inside, Hopper stopped Mike, saying:

"El may have forgiven you already, but I haven't, so you need to get out!"

"You serious right now?" asked Mike.

"I sure as hell am, and I don't think you want to test me."

Mike shook his head and started to walk out the door.

"What the hell is this?" asked El.

"Your dad wants me to leave," he said.

She cut her eyes at him and then grabbed Mike's wrist.

"Mike, don't go!" she begged.

"I don't have much of a choice, do I?"

"No, but just ride home safe, okay? I love you. *kisses*"

"I will. Love you too."

33. Halfway Happy

Hey guys! I'm so sorry I haven't been more active lately. I just wanted these last two chapters to be perfect, plus, things have been hectic with exams and all since school ended not that long ago and I have just been so busy for a lot of reasons. A whole lot of shit has been going on, but I have been working hard and have so been looking forward to this moment. I'm taking a big risk with this chapter, and I'm not sure how you guys are going to feel about it, but grab a box of tissues, honey, because this chapter is a rollercoaster full of emotions! What I think that you will like about this chapter is the communication development between Mike and Eleven. It shows a lot of growth in their relationship despite the problems they're having at this point in the story and I kind of like how hot & cold and conflicted they come off in this particular chapter. I think that it stays true to who they are as characters. While this chapter may be heartbreaking in some aspects, I hope that it will be heartwarming in other ways, particularly with the "halfway happy" ending. There's still lots of love, attraction, and chemistry in the air, but even so, is the end of Mileven as we know it? Don't fret! You'll know soon enough in my next and final chapter. (P.S. I've already written it, but I'm in the process of editing it currently and I also want to wait maybe a day or two before I post it because I think it adds a little to the drama and cliffhangeriness of this chapter.)

It was a day like any other, a day that they thought to be normal, except for the fact that Mike did the unthinkable, something truly terrible. He lied to El. He lied to El and said that he was helping his mom with something when really, he was just trying to find an excuse that was better than "I'm purposely not going on a date with you tomorrow so I can hang out with our friends alone without you."

When Mike and El were first dating, he found that she had the tendency to be a little a clingy sometimes. She would call him multiple times if she didn't hear from him, but for El, this was more out of concern for his safety than it was desperateness because you never know when you live in a town as cursed as Hawkins. However,

as their relationship grew and she grew as a person, along with Hopper and Max's help as well, El learned when to hold back and how to be casual. So, clearly being clingy was not the issue here. The issue was that one day Mike realized how much time he'd been spending with El and how little time he'd been spending with his other friends. He secretly missed having guy time when it was just the four of them and there were no girls involved, despite how much he had grown to like Max and love El.

The next day, El called Mike in the afternoon, though she never expected to learn what she did once she dialed his number...

phone rings

picks up

"Hello?" answered Mrs. Wheeler.

"Hi, Mrs. Wheeler, this is El."

"Hey, sweetie! How are you?"

"I'm good, how 'bout you?"

"Doing well. What's up?"

"Well, I hope I'm not interrupting your plans with Mike, I just wanted to talk to him about something."

"You just missed him, but what plans are you referring to? The only plans he has are with you, or at least that's what he told me just now."

After hearing this, she slowly started to realize that he not only lied to his mother about what he was doing, but he lied to her, his own girlfriend, as well. She tried her best to cover for him though, despite how guilty it made her feel.

"Oh, is it not Mother's Day? I must've been looking at the wrong month on the calendar. My bad! Let's see here...Ah, July. Yes, he and I have plans to hang out today. He's probably on the way right now, so I'd better go, but it was nice talking to you!"

"Wait, but sweetie-

"Bye, Mrs. Wheeler!"

"*sighs* Nice talking to you too. Bye, El."

hangs up

She could hardly believe such a thing. The thought of Mike lying to El was sickening, so much so, that it caused her to well up a bit.

phone rings

picks up

"Hello?" El sadly answered.

"El! Hey, it's Max. Are you busy today?"

"Apparently not. I asked Mike yesterday if he wanted us to do something together today, but I think he lied to me."

"About what?"

"Why he couldn't hang out."

"What makes you think that?"

"Well, I called his house and he had told me earlier that he couldn't hang out today because he had to help his mom with something, but when I mentioned that I didn't want to interrupt Mrs. Wheeler's plans with him when she picked up the phone, she said that the only plans he had were with me and that he had said that he was hanging out with me today. So, I had to cover his ass and pretend that I thought it was Mother's Day because my calendar was on the wrong page."

"Aww, El, I'm so sorry! I know how much you hate lying. God, that asshole! I'm gonna kill him..."

"I just can't believe he'd do this to me..." said El.

"Mark my words, boys are good-for-nothing scoundrels! Who needs them?"

"Yeah! *pauses* Wait, I'm sorry, what's a scoundrel?" El asked.

"It's like a person who's dishonest or has no real morals."

"Oh, well, in that case, you're right. They most certainly are that, but the difference is that he's my scoundrel. I love him, I just can't help myself!"

"C'mon, El! Haven't you ever wondered what it would be like if you didn't have a boyfriend? How your life would be different? All you've known is what it's like to be in a relationship, but you're most independent when you're alone."

"I mean, yeah, I guess I'm a little curious..."

"Exactly! So, that's why I propose that we go to the mall together today, just you and me. Besides, we can get you a whole new set of clothes. Any kind that you want!"

"Really?"

"Yeah! What do you say?"

"Okay, sure! That sounds like fun."

"Perfect!"

"Oh, I don't have any money though..." said El.

"Just ask your dad if you can take a couple of bills from his money stash to buy new clothes with."

"Okay. I'll call him and ask and then I'll call you back."

"Sounds good," said Max.

"See you in a bit," said El.

"Bye."

hangs up

Next, she called her Dad.

rings

picks up

"Hawkins Police Department. What is the state of your emergency?"

"Hey Flo, El here. No emergency, just transfer me over to my dad's office please."

"Oh, no can do, I'm afraid. He's not here at the moment."

"Oh. It's just, I need to borrow some cash because my friend's taking me to the mall, but the only money I have is from our stash at home."

"*sighs* Just take some from the stash and I'll tell him I said you could. How 'bout that?"

"You're the best, Flo! Thanks."

"You're very welcome. Have fun, dear! Babye."

hangs up

El then called Max back to let her know she had money and about 20 minutes later, Max showed up to her house and they biked the way there.

"Well, here it is! Starcourt Mall."

"Wow! It's huge," said El.

"Just wait till you see the inside..." Max said, opening one of the doors.

"It's so, so-"

"Colorful?" Max asked.

"Yeah!" El replied.

"Oh, El, this is going to be so much fun! So, what do you say? Should we start shopping or grab a bite first."

"Shop. I kinda had a late lunch."

"Me too."

"So, where should we go first?"

"How 'bout The Gap?"

"Lead the way!"

They went in and tried on about a thousand things before landing on definite choices. El explored her style a bit and boy, it could not be more obvious that blue was her favorite color! Though El liked all of her past looks, she wanted something that was a little in between her girly, Sunday school style and her street punk style. So, she specifically looked into rompers, high-waisted pants, and jumpers, all of which had a pop of color and a feminine edge to them. She ended up buying about 5 different outfits and wore her multicolored romper out of the store once she bought it. Then, they went to the Flash Studio to get a couple of cute pictures together. Max even had El try on high heels for the first time and helped her walk in them, holding her hand to keep her balanced, but of course, she tripped and fell flat on her face like the adorable clutz that she is. They burst out into laughter, earning strange looks from the other customers, some that were even peers from school. Then, they decided to make a trip to Claire's for some accessories to match.

"So, what do you think of it so far?"

"What do I think of *what* so far?" asked El.

"The mall, shopping, I don't know!"

"I love it!"

"Me too. Didn't think I would, but it's fun! Then, again, maybe it's because I've got my girl right here with me."

smiles

"I don't know about you, but being around all of this food sure is making me hungry!" said Max.

"Same here. Where do you wanna go?"

"I was thinking Burger King. Does that sound good to you?"

"Yeah, sure!"

As they got hungrier, they headed over to Burger King, where they spotted Stacey and her posse, lying in wake. After hearing about how rude and mean she was to Dustin at the Snow Ball and seeing the way she and her robots of friends rolled their eyes at the sight of El tripping in heels, they knew what they had to do.

"Oh, look, it's Stacey and her clones..."

"You up for a little fun?" asked El.

"Always!" said Max.

El stared intensely at the group, with a stare not nearly as devilish or murderous as usual, but more so with a concentration so deep yet so effortless. And with that, their drinks exploded in their hands, spraying them with juice that dripped all down their chests. The two laughed hysterically in the corner, losing their balance and playful pawing at each other like all friends do when they both find something funny. They each started to run in the other direction, hoping that Stacey wouldn't catch their eye, but then, something else grabbed their attention.

As the girls stood in line, they found something they never expected they'd see: Mike, Lucas, and Will sitting on a bench.

"Max?"

"Yeah?"

"Do you see what I see?"

"Where?"

points

"Is that-"

"Yep!"

"Those little shits!" said Max.

Meanwhile, at the same time, Dustin and Steve walked out of Scoops Ahoy during Steve's break.

"What about The Hulk? Surely he'd beat Superman in a fight?" asked Steve.

"Are you seriously this dense? No way, man. Superman would win in a heartbeat," said Dustin.

"Doesn't Hulk have limitless strength though?"

"Yeah, but even so that's just not possible."

"Where are your nerdy little friends anyway?"

"I don't know. We haven't hung out in a while."

"But isn't that them right there?" *points*

"I don't know. Grab the pair of binoculars out of my backpack, will ya?"

"Yep, that's them..." said Dustin, sadly.

"But why would they hang out without you?"

"I'm not sure..."

"That really sucks. I'm sorry, man."

"Yeah, it was pretty shitty on their part."

"Well, believe me, the next time they stop by to get ice cream, I'll charge them extra."

"Thanks for having my back, Steve. You're the best!"

"Aww, c'mere, man! Let's hug it out."

hugs

Back at Burger King:

"You didn't tell me that Lucas was in on this too," said El.

"That's because we're not on speaking terms right now."

"Oh, I didn't realize..."

"Yeah. It's more recent though. I didn't want you to think I've been keeping something from you or anything like that."

"No, I wouldn't think that. You're my best friend, Max. Best friends tell each other everything."

"I-I'm your best friend?"

"Hell yeah!"

"*smiles* You're my best friend too! Just don't tell Lucas though because he thinks *he* is."

"As long as you don't tell Mike!"

"Deal. *shakes hand*"

giggles

They then made sure to make a trip over to Scoops Ahoy on their way out to see Steve in action, though they never expected to find Dustin there as well.

"Dustin! There you are!" said Max. "Why aren't you with the guys?"

"They-They didn't invite me..."

"Those assholes...I'm sorry, dude. Well, you're welcome to join us if you'd like!" she continued.

"Yeah, seriously," El reassured, rubbing his arm in support.

"That's really sweet of you guys, but I'm actually good hanging out

with Steve here."

"Alright, well, let us know if you change your mind," said El.

Dustin nods

"Robin, right?" asked Max.

"Yeah, and you're...Max?"

"Yep. I think Steve introduced us once."

"I don't believe we've met. I'm Robin. *extends hand to El*"

"No, we haven't. It's nice to meet you, I'm El."

"Well, what can I get you ladies?"

"I'll have black cherry, please. El?"

"Um...I'll have the cotton candy, please."

"Coming right up..." said Robin.

"Cotton candy, huh?" asked Max.

"Yep," said El.

"Is it because it reminds you of when we all went to the fair together, particularly the part when you and Mike ate cotton candy and rode the ferris wheel?"

"Maybe..." she said coyly.

[2 minutes later]

"Here you go. That'll be \$3.30 each," said Robin.

"Thanks. *hands money*"

"Have a nice day!"

"Thanks, you too," said El.

She was able to shake it off, that sickening feeling of betrayal that made her skin crawl. She told herself that it would all blow over, that all that mattered now was that she was having a good time with Max, but she found that it still haunted her later. For the meantime, the two took their Scoops Ahoy ice cream with them on a bus back to El's, where they bopped to music and read some Tiger Beat. However, when Max left, that sinking feeling, that terrible thought ate away at her.

"I know you're mad at Mike right now, but what's he usually like, as a boyfriend, I mean?" asked Max.

"He's amazing. We never run out of things to talk about and he always knows just what to say when we do. He's really romantic and sentimental too."

"Sounds like a pretty good boyfriend to me, aside from what happened today."

"Yeah, he is...was."

"He's still your boyfriend, El. Don't sweat over this one incident."

"I know, you're right."

"Hey, um, is Mike a good kisser?"

"I don't know...He's my first boyfriend."

"So, that's a yes then?"

"*giggles* Yes, he's a good kisser, a great one even."

"What about Lucas?" she continued.

"Lucas is good too, really good. He thinks he's so smooth, but who am I kidding, sometimes he is."

"*chuckles* What's he like as a boyfriend?"

"Well, he can be a real pain in the ass sometimes, but I love him. I mean, he and I are just so similar in ways I never thought we could

be, but he's not a romantic like Mike. He's more chill in that way."

"Do you prefer it like that?"

"Most of the time, yeah, because it takes the pressure off of things, but other times, I wish he would make more gestures and arrange alone time with me."

"I get that. *pauses* I like talking about boys with you, Max."

"I like talking about boys with you too, El."

smiles

"El?"

"Yeah."

"I'm so glad that I met you, that we became such good friends. If I'm being completely honest, you're the first real girl friend that I've ever had and I couldn't be happier."

"Really?"

"Yeah. Back in California, all of my friends were guys. I mean, most of them still are, as I'm sure you know, *giggles* but I just always had trouble making friends with girls. I never knew how to relate to them because I've always been into different things and it's not like I'm the nicest, friendliest person or anything."

"But you are nice!"

"I'm nice to you, but that's because I like you. I mean, you and I are a lot alike, more so than I thought. We both share this fierceness and daring nature, except you're soft on the outside and tough to the core while I'm tough on the outside and soft to the core."

"*chuckles* Very true."

"Anyway, all I'm saying is thanks, I guess, for being such a great friend and everything. I feel like through exposing you to all of this mall culture and what it's like to be in a relationship, that I myself am

starting to find a liking for it, surprisingly."

"No thank *you*! You've been so kind to me, even after how rude I was to you last year."

"Well, what's in the past stays in the past. The present's what really counts because it determines everything moving forward."

The boys, on the other hand, weren't having nearly as much fun as El, Max, Dustin, and Steve all thought they were. In fact, they were bored as hell. The only reason they had gone to the mall in the first place was that earlier, they were playing D&D when Mike and Lucas realized that they had both grown out of it, while Will, on the other hand, came fully dressed in a wizard's costume.

"*checks watch* How long has it been?" asked Mike.

"10 minutes," said Lucas.

"Seriously? It's only been that long?"

"I'm afraid so..." said Will.

"And you thought this was going to be better than D&D!" said Lucas.

"Yeah, I did actually!" said Mike.

"Why don't we just go to Waldenbooks? That'd be fun, right?" Will suggested.

"I'm down," said Lucas.

"Yeah, sure," said Mike.

Once they were done shopping, the boys all rode on over to their houses by bike. Mrs. Wheeler chose not to bring it up, the fact that Mike had lied to her until the other boys left, but now that they were gone, she decided to confront him about it.

"Hey, Mom. I'm back!"

"You and the boys have fun?" asked Mrs. Wheeler.

"Actually, we were really bored, but it ended up being fun in the end."

"Really, hmm...That's weird because I could've sworn you said you were going to see El today!"

"I-I can explain."

"No explanation needed! El called-"

"Uh oh..."

"Uh oh's right! You're in big trouble, mister. Not only did you lie to me about where you were, but your own girlfriend too!"

"I'm sorry, Mom, it's just, I didn't think you would let me go to the mall with my friends after my punishment for ditching El."

"And it didn't occur to you that this could come back to bite you and get you in even more trouble."

"No. I don't know what I was thinking. I'm sorry."

"Well, I'm not the one you should be saying you're sorry to. I forgive you, Michael, but you should be worried about El. Now, you call her and apologize, but don't forget, you're grounded for two weeks."

"Two weeks?!"

"Two!"

"Fine..." he said.

He stomped over to the phone and dialed her number.

rings

picks up

"Hello?" El answered.

"Hey, I miss you," he said.

"Yeah, I bet! You looked pretty bored at the mall today," she said.

"*sighs* El, I'm so sorry. I never should've lied to you about why I couldn't hang out."

"Yeah, you shouldn't have, but I lied for you, so what does that make me?"

"A good girlfriend...?"

"Wrong. It makes me a dishonest and that's not who I am."

"I'm sorry for putting you in that position. That's not fair to you."

"Why did you do it?"

"I don't know, I guess it's just...sometimes I miss hanging out with just the boys."

"You treated Max like shit for a year and now it's my turn, huh? Is that what this is about?"

"No, of course not! I love you, El. That's the only reason I ever treated her like shit because I didn't want her to take your place in the party. You were the only person I wanted to be in it anyway. I like Max a lot now that I've given her a chance, but I was just so hung up on you that I couldn't see that at the time."

"How do I know you're not lying to me now?"

"Because you love me too and you're supposed to trust those that you love."

"Don't tell me what to do, Mike. You've done enough already."

"You're right, I'm sorry. Anyway, I just, I love you so much, but sometimes I just want to hang out with the guys, especially since this is Will's first time hanging out with us normally since he was possessed and all last year. He's still getting to know you guys."

"Then why didn't you just say so? I would've understood."

"I don't know, I've just been making stupid decisions lately. I don't know what's wrong with me. Just please forgive me and let me make it up to you...for real this time."

"Even if I wanted to forgive you, which believe me, I don't, it's not like we can hang out. My dad's still pissed at you for the last thing you did and I'm sure your mom added to your first punishment. Am I wrong?"

"No, you're right...You're always right."

"Dammit, Wheeler! I can't do anything but forgive you and I hate myself for it. I just love you too much."

"You don't have to forgive me, it's okay."

"No, but I do...if this is ever going to work."

"So, what do we do?"

"Well, there's nothing we can do except sneak around I guess. I'll come over to your house of course. No reason for you to get in any more trouble than you already are."

"But then you'll get in trouble and Hopper's much worse than my mother. Plus, he frowns upon you leaving the house in general."

"It's okay, Mike, I can handle it. We don't have to make a plan yet though, we can wait."

"You're right."

"So, how are things?" she asked.

"Same ol', same ol'."

The thing about El was that she could always sense what was really going on, even when Mike wouldn't come right out and say it.

"So, still kinda weird, with your parents and all?"

"Yeah, just haven't gotten used to it yet...I mean, I always knew they

had problems, but I just never expected it to get this bad."

"Yeah, I'm sorry."

"Thanks. I appreciate that. *sighs* I just need something to take my mind off of it, you know?"

"Well, maybe I can help with that. What do you say we both go get a milkshake or something?"

"Yeah, I'd like that."

"Sweet! Okay, well what's the plan?"

"Well, it's 4:30, when will your dad be home?"

"5:30ish most likely, but if I know my dad at all, he's not going to come home on an empty stomach."

"Okay, so that leaves out just going straight on Cherry and cutting onto Maple, right?"

"Well, yeah because that's right by the police station, but we're trying to go to the diner, not your house, right?"

"Oh yeah! I'm just so used to taking you back to my house I guess. *chuckles*"

"Okay, well, since we're not going on our normal route, you should probably just get on Cornwallis and then cut onto Kurley and take a right, right?"

"That's way too complicated and by the time we got there, your dad would already be home."

"Okay, geez, I'm sorry. I'm still new to this town, you know...Well, this town is still new to me at least."

"You're right, I'm sorry for being so short. *sighs* How about I just get a ride from Lucas or Steve?"

"You can't. They're both still mad at us for ditching them that one

time to hang out."

"Oh shit, you're right. Well, in that case, we should just take the back road."

"Okay, that makes sense. Well, I guess I'll just jump over the fence, cut through the woods onto Denfield, then cross over onto Mt Sinai and Randolph in order to get to Kurley, where I'll wait for you."

"And what are you going to do with your bike?"

"I don't know, ditch it I guess."

"You can't do that."

"Fine. Just give me a minute, I'll come up with something."

Things were starting to fall apart for no real or good reason, but they couldn't deny the fact that things were different. Each of the party members had experienced their own version of growing pains and this was partly why things had changed so much between the two of them. El was always either distant or needy and never in between, while Mike was too caught up in his own family drama to even be there for her when she needed him most. His parent's separation only made matters worse in the sense that it only further complicated their already very complicated ways of meeting up. You see, Mike had angered Hopper when he stood El up, so for a while, Mike and El couldn't even see each other anymore, not until they figured out a way to meet up. It was just like it used to be, where their meet-ups always involved shortcuts, code names, secret hideouts & meet-up spots, etc. But one day Mike had finally had enough.

"*sighs* El, I can't do this anymore...not now, not for a while at least."

"Can't do what?"

"The sneaking around, the lying, the blowing off my friends-"

"Hey, they're my friends too!" El said defensively.

"But doesn't that make you sad? That we have to sacrifice all of this

stuff just to be alone together?"

"You've never had a problem with it before! Didn't you even say that you liked the sneaking around because it made it feel like a forbidden romance, or was that all just a lie too?"

"*shakes head* This has just gotten way out of hand..."

"I know, I don't like it any more than you do, but it's worth it if it means that I get to be with you. Mike, we've been through everything together, we can't give up now!"

"Giving up? Who said anything about giving up? All I was saying is that it's just too hard and it shouldn't be..."

"Well, what are you saying then, d-do you want to break up?"

"No, nuh, nuh, nuh, no! I don't know, I just need space..."

"Space!"

"Yeah, space. I think it'll do us both some good. Who knows, maybe it'll give us some time to think!"

"About what?"

"This. Us. The whole thing."

"If you need to think about it, then you're not who I thought you were, Mike."

"What do you want from me?!"

"Nothing, just... *sighs* nothing."

"Well, then maybe we should just break up already!"

"Maybe we should!"

both pause in silence

"Whoa!" said Mike.

"Yeah..." said El.

"*chuckles* This is crazy, right? This is crazy! We're crazy! We're not breaking up...There's just no way."

"*nervously laughs* Right! Breaking up, hah, over what?"

"*wheezes* Exactly!"

They couldn't help but deny it, as the idea seemed so far fetched and unlike them, but the more they said it out loud, the more real it became.

"I didn't really mean it..." she said.

"And yet you still said it."

"So did you! *sighs* I thought we were better than this, I thought *you* were better than this! You called me every night for 353 days and *now* you're giving up on me?"

"For the last time, I am NOT giving up on you!"

"Then what are you doing, Mike, because it sure feels like you are!"

"I'm just walking away...for now."

"Well, what's that supposed to mean?"

"I don't know."

"*sighs* Mike, I have to know what this means for us...I mean, is this it? Are we done?"

"No, no, it can't be. It was never supposed to end like this. I would never break up with someone over the phone. I'm not that type of guy..."

"Then what type of guy are you?"

"The type that comes over and works things out."

"I was hoping you'd say that."

The mood suddenly changed. Neither of them actually knew what was going to happen next and that scared them a lot, but the possibility of their relationship finally coming to an end scared them even more.

"*sighs* Let's just talk this out when I get there, okay?"

"Yeah, sure. I'll see you then."

"Bye."

"Bye."

hangs up

As Mike made his way to El's house, she paced around the room frantically, playing out all of the possible scenarios in her head. The sound of his knock startled her but she opened the door immediately regardless.

"Hi," he said.

"Mike..." she said emotionally as she ran toward him in a hug.

She threw her arms around his neck, and sniffled over his shoulder, still crying a little from their phone call. Hugging him seemed to comfort her, however, and she closed her eyes and grinned as they did. Both of his hands clutched her back tightly as he rubbed her through her shirt. She was wearing one of Hopper's shirts, but not one of his casual lumberjack ones, his dress shirt. It was white, oversized, and although her hair was in a messy bun and she was only wearing tiny shorts underneath, she had never looked prettier.

awkward silence

"I don't know what to say or where to start," said El.

"I don't either," Mike revealed.

"Well, we both said it, we can't take that back, but just 'cause we said it doesn't mean that we have to go through with it, right?"

"Right."

"So, where are you at?"

"I don't know. *sighs* I mean, I hate to say this, but I guess I just don't see this working out the way that I did before," said Mike.

"But why? Where is all of this coming from?"

"I've just been thinking about us lately, a lot, and I realized that we just jumped into things so fast, and I'll take responsibility for that because I was the one who told you I liked you and kissed you, but we didn't think about what could go wrong. Trouble seems to follow us everywhere we go."

"You mean trouble follows *me* wherever *I* go."

"No, that's not what I'm saying. *sighs* I guess I'm just saying that I would rather still have you in my life even just as a friend if it ensured your safety than I would as my girlfriend if it meant losing you forever."

"Oh, so that's what this is about! I should've known..." said El.

"You do realize you're at more risk of danger just by being with me, right? And I know that you can protect yourself, believe me, I do, but to what extent?" asked Mike.

"That's always been the case, but it's never stopped us before. Why is it stopping you now?"

"Because, El, *sighs* I can't be the one responsible if something bad happened to you, I just can't! If something happened to you and you died, I wouldn't be able to live with myself! I don't want to live that way, and I don't want you to have to live that way, in constant fear for your life. I care about you, *gulps* *love* you too much to do that."

"Well, what do we do?"

"Well, there's nothing we can do except-"

"Don't say it! Don't you dare say it!" she said.

"Believe me, I don't want to..."

"I don't want to either!"

"But I just don't see any other way or any other scenario where this could work..." said Mike.

"Stop! Mike, don't you see? The only reason you're saying these things is that your family is having problems and you don't know how to deal with it, so you're shutting down. I know you, Mike! You're just trying to end things before you can actually push me away..."

"I'm not shutting down! Why would you say that? That has nothing to do with this."

"Then what does this have to do with, Mike? Huh? Is it my dad? Is it that conversation we had at the wedding? Are you not into me anymore? Are you gay?"

"No, it's none of that."

"Then just tell me what it is!"

"I'm trying to, you won't let me!"

"This is ridiculous...Mike, I swear to god if you don't tell me right now, I'm gonna-"

"I'm trying to give you the answers that you want, but it's just not that easy because I'm not entirely sure of them myself. *sighs* I don't know, I guess I'm just trying to end things before matters get worse."

"But you and I both know that's inevitable. That doesn't accomplish anything. You're just walking away because you're scared."

"No, you're not listening to me."

"And why should I?"

"*places hands on shoulders* El, just listen to me, please! I can't leave you alone like this when you're all upset with me... I hate this just as much as you do, but we can get through this, we will get through

this! I know we can. We just have to take it one step at a time. *sighs* Look, I don't think this is permanent, I just think this is what's best for now, just until all of this lab stuff blows over once and for all. If we can survive 353 days without each other, then we can certainly get through a short period as friends!"

She looked at him with glassy eyes, saying "Mike, I-" and stopping mid-sentence. She tried to finish what she was going to say, to tell him what she needed to tell him, but she couldn't seem to get one word out. Instead, she let out a wail and broke out into sobs.

"*wipes tears, holds face* El, please don't cry now! If you're going to cry, then I'm going to cry... *sniffles* I just can't end things with you, not like this..."

"*speaks while still crying* Any way that we end it isn't going to be easy or the right way because we shouldn't be ending it at all, so we might as well just get it over with already and finally put it behind us."

"*sniffles* God, I don't want this to end, it-it's just too painful! Why am I even doing this? I still love you!"

"*tears up* I love you too."

He held her close in a warm embrace. Her head fell beneath his chin and nuzzled into his chest as they both sobbed, the collar of his shirt soaked in her tears.

"This sucks!" he said.

"I'm going to miss this..."

"I know, it breaks my heart too. Let's just enjoy it now while we have it, okay?"

"Okay."

Not long after that, Hopper came home, knocking on the door and waiting for El to let him in. Though still wrapped up into Mike's arms, she managed to open the door for him.

"Hey, honey...Whoa! What happened here? You alright, kid?"

Mike motioned Hopper over and had him sit on the opposite side so that El was in the middle of them both.

"*whispers in ear* I've gotta go, but please remember that I'm doing this not to hurt you, but because I love you. Take care of yourself. We'll talk soon. *looks into eyes, kisses forehead*"

Then, he slowly started to loosen his grip and let go, gently turning her towards Hopper, who was ready to take her in his arms. She hugged him back for comfort, but once it occurred to her that Mike was actually leaving, she pulled away from him and said:

"Wait!"

She ran up to Mike and then stopped, standing closer to his face than he thought she would. Then, she looked back at Hopper and cleared her throat, signaling him to leave the room to give them some privacy.

"Before we ended things, I didn't know that our last kiss was going to be our last, so..."

She reached up on her tippy toes and brought her face to his. She grabbed the sides of his face and he grabbed the sides of her waist. She pressed her palms against his cheeks so that her elbows were no longer by her side, but rather were pointing outward in the air. Then, she leaned in, put her lips on his, and paused, just so they could both get used to the feeling again before proceeding forward. Then, she felt him start to take the lead, his forehead nudging into the side of her face as their bodies swayed in place and their lips danced against each other. And he kissed her, he kissed her like it was the only thing he knew how to do because he wanted to give her something to hold onto. The palms that laid against his face grabbed ahold of the sleeve on his shoulder in the heat of the moment just before letting go. And then they each pulled away, both staring blankly into space until their eyes caught each other in a gaze. "No, don't say it," he begged her. Finally, she put a hand to his chest, patted it twice, and softly but emotionally said, "Goodbye, Mike," as her hand slid down and returned to her side.

Those words, oh, those words! So familiar and yet just as painful to him as the last time they were said by her, except this time in a whole new context. Tears leaked out of his eyes, leaving the tips of his eyelashes wet and darker than usual. He couldn't turn away. He was frozen in place, just like the last time, but somewhere or another, he finally found the courage to leave.

It was then that El ran to the closed door, pressing her hand and leaned her forehead against it. As she suddenly became overwhelmed with emotion, her hand started to slide down it just like it did when she put it to Mike's chest only moments before. She turned around and yanked her scrunchie out, her back slithering down the door until her bottom hit the ground and she covered her face with her hands. She wept behind her knees which shielded her now bright red face.

Hopper couldn't stand watching her torture herself like this one second more. He couldn't let her go through this alone. So, he sat beside her and held her hand, rubbing her thumb with his own. She lifted her head in response and look at him square in the eyes, waiting for him to say something.

"I'm awfully sorry, kid."

"Thanks," she said miserably.

They sat in silence and hugged for a few minutes until Hopper said:

"You know that Joyce and I dated back in high school, right?"

"Yeah."

"Well, we broke up too and I was devastated."

"*sniffles* Why'd you break up?"

"Let's just say she met Will's dad and I no longer fit in the picture."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be! It's all in the past."

"But now you're together! That must feel good..." she said, slowly starting to remember why she was upset in the first place.

"Do you wanna talk about it now?"

"No...Yes! *sighs, sniffles* I don't know..."

"It's up to you, kid. But when you are ready to talk, come and find me, okay? I'll be waiting for you at the dinner table."

Once she had calmed down a bit, she finally gave into the sweet smells of eggos coming from the kitchen.

walks over

sits down

"I think you got some snot on my shoulder earlier," he said, trying to make her laugh.

"Dad now's not the time..."

"Sorry. Well, do you want something to drink? How 'bout some water?"

"No thanks."

"Aww, c'mon, it'll make you feel better!"

"No, it won't."

"Okay, juice then?"

"No, I already said I don't want anything."

"At least have something to eat. Your eggos are getting cold!"

"Dad, stop! You do this every time I'm upset. No matter how hard you try to distract me, it's not going to work! The way I feel right now can't be fixed by eating or drinking something. If you don't get that, then why even waste your time talking to me at all?"

"*grabs shoulder* El-"

"No, don't you 'El' me! Just-just leave me alone..." she said, storming off into her room, slamming the door behind her.

[15 minutes later]

"El, can I come in please?"

knocks

"El, c'mon now! I know that I screwed up and you're upset with me, but this has gone on for long enough."

knocks vigorously

"Look, you can keep this door locked all night if you want to, but you're going to have to come out or let me in eventually. Otherwise, you'll starve, and that's just stupid! *And-*"

She opened the door just before he could finish and with an almost helpless tone in her voice, said:

"We're not stupid..."

He walked over to the side of her bed and said:

"Scoot over."

She adjusted herself so that her face was facing his and said:

"*takes deep breath* I'm ready to talk about it."

She didn't have a mother to vent out to and process her feelings with, but he tried his best to be that for her, though it wasn't always easy.

"Okay, good, good. So, walk me through it. What happened?"

She went into detail about everything from the incident at the mall to the phone call to when she kissed him goodbye, but talking about it was essentially the same thing as reliving it for her, so it wasn't without its upsets. It did, however, feel good to get it all out.

"You really love him, don't you?"

nods while crying

"*strokes hair* Hey, for what it's worth, I'm sorry if anything I ever said to him gave him any ideas about ending this with you and I'm sorry if I made things more difficult for you guys when I continued to stay mad at him even after you had forgiven him."

"Thanks, Dad."

"Sure thing, kid."

Not long after that, they decided to watch a movie together. El, of course, couldn't help but pick a rom-com out since she had love on the brain. Hopper, of course, wasn't surprised but was dreading every second of it, as he managed to complain and pick apart different scenes of the movie, which El actually found very amusing. Once the movie was over, they each made their way to bed.

Meanwhile, Mike was at home, just as devastated as El was. He laid on the couch all day, wallowing, eating a shit ton of potato chips while having a tv marathon...that was until his mother made him stop.

"Mike, honey, you're going to turn into a couch potato if you don't get up soon."

"I'm fine right where I am, thank you."

"Alright, but don't forget that your tv time's almost up."

"Whatever..."

"I think you mean 'Yes, ma'am'."

"Yes, ma'am..." he muttered, annoyed.

[2 hours later]

"MICHAEL!"

no answer

"MICHAEL!"

no answer

"*stands in front of tv with hands on hips* Michael Theodore Wheeler! You get your butt up right this instant!"

tilts head, tries to look at tv over her shoulder

"*lifts arms up in annoyance* Like father like son! *scoffs* I swear, sometimes you are the spitting image of your father!" she said.

"I'm sorry to have to be the one to do this, but *unplugs tv* no more tv, not until you tell me what's going on with you. *sits down*" she continued.

"*sighs* Fine. I- *tears up* El and I broke up..."

"Oh, sweetie, c'mere!" she said, bringing him in for a hug.

pulls away

"Listen, how about I fix you some real food and we'll talk about it. Does that sound alright?"

"Yeah, I guess we have to eventually...It might as well be now."

"That's the spirit...sorta!"

"What would you like for supper?" she continued.

"Anything but eggos."

"Understood," she said.

After that conversation, Mike started to go through a phase of denial, where he questioned everything about their fight. He avoided his friends for a while, isolating himself just enough to keep busy and get it off his mind. When that didn't work, he figured he should work on himself a little more. What better way to work on himself than to work out and get those noodle arms back into shape!

They were depressed for weeks. Neither of them ever left the house,

but eventually, they got to place where they could accept it, and after a long time of keeping it to themselves and a lot of thought, Mike and El each decided to break the news to Lucas and Max.

[El's House]

"And the worse part is, *sniffles* it's like I can't even be mad at him because the reason he broke up with me wasn't selfish at all...It was the opposite actually. Oddly, it was romantic," said El.

"How can a breakup be romantic?" asked Max.

"He broke up with me because he wanted me to be safe, he wanted to protect me, but he didn't think he could do that and he was afraid of what would happen to me if we stayed together."

"Are you sure? It kinda sounds like he bailed on you."

"No, no, you don't understand. You see, Mike is so unbelievably loyal that he would literally distance himself from the people he cares about if it means that they're safer."

"*laughs* That's so stupid..." said Max.

"*laughs* Believe me, I know."

"But kinda sweet, I gotta give it to him."

"A little ironic too..."

"Yeah, no kidding!"

"*laughs* Thanks, Max. I feel a lot better now."

"Really? I feel like I barely did anything, but you're welcome I guess."

"Trust me, you did more than nothing! You let me vent out to you about what happened, you made sure I didn't do anything I stupid, like call Mike and beg him to take me back, and most importantly, you helped me realize what all of this means. Now I can move on."

This thought, the thought of El moving on caused Max to feel

conflicted. She wanted El to be happy, and though she knew it would never last, she hoped that with Lucas' help and a little meddling, she could bring the two of them back together for good. So, she decided to say something about it.

"Yeah, El, about that...I-"

"Max, don't sell yourself short! You deserve the credit."

"No, it's not that, I was just going to say that while I want you to be happy and normally I would tell you to move on, this is you and Mike we're talking about! I think you should wait this out a little bit."

"Wait it out?"

"Yeah, I don't know, I guess I'm just saying I could see this blowing over in a couple of days."

"Why do you think that?"

"Oh, El, I don't think he could last a day without you..."

"Oh, but you're wrong, Max...He lasted 353 to be exact!"

"Yeah, but that was different. You guys were separated before you even knew what you meant to each other and that distance helped you figure it out. Even though you're broken up now, he knows for sure this time that you're still here, and now that he actually knows what it's like to be with you. I have a feeling he won't take that for granted."

"Maybe you're right...Gosh, what should I do?"

"Just keep that in mind, but be casual about it. Explore what you guys have and see where it goes or where it could go."

"That's really good advice. Thanks, Max!"

"Of course! What are friends for!"

smiles, hugs

[Mike's House]

"How you are you, man? You've been MIA for almost a week now," said Lucas.

"Oh, I've been fine, you know, just trying to beat my top score on Zork, that's all!"

"Uh huh, and how are you *really*?"

"*shakes head* I'm a hot mess, Lucas. El and I broke up..."

"Oh shit..."

"Yeah..."

"Well, do you wanna talk about it?"

"No, I just wanna cry and play video games."

"Okay, we can do that. What do you wanna play?"

"Galaga sound good?"

"Hell yeah!"

"Sweet!"

game starts

Halfway through the game, Mike said:

"I miss El..."

"What happened to not wanting to talk about it?"

"Well, I changed my mind!"

"*laughs* Okay, just checking."

"It's just, *sniffles* I know that people our age break up all of the time and most teen relationships only last like a day or a week, but I was really sure about this one," said Mike.

"Yeah, I think we all were," said Lucas.

"That was until I screwed everything up!"

"Don't blame yourself, Mike. It was a mutual decision, right?"

"Well, sorta."

"Sorta?"

"It's-It's complicated."

"What's complicated? You either made the decision together or you didn't."

"I guess technically I'm the one who ended things, and with good reason, but now my heart's telling me something else, Lucas..."

Mike sobs

Lucas pauses game

"It's really that bad, huh? *rubs and pats back* I'm sorry, man. The first one's always the worst."

"*sniffles* But it's not even that. It's just that she's been my everything for the past two years and I can't imagine my life without her."

"I get that, but Mike, El's still here and you guys are still best friends."

resumes game

"Yeah, but that's just not good enough. We barely talk at all anymore, since we ended things. Things aren't how they used to be, but I want them to be...I need them to be."

"Things could still change. I have a pretty good feeling that you guys will still find a way back to each other."

"You really think so?"

"*sets game down* You wanna know what I think?"

"I mean, yeah. Shoot!"

"I think you should tell her all of the things that you just told me."

"*shakes head in hesitation* I don't know...I think that might just be awkward and make things worse and that's the last thing that I want to do."

"So, make it awkward! The worst that could happen is her not feeling the same way."

"Yeah, no shit, Sherlock!"

"But you and I both know that's not true."

"Yeah, I guess you're right..."

"You bet your ass, I'm right! Now go get her!"

"Thanks, man."

"Anytime, dude," said Lucas.

"Oh god, you're even starting to talk like her now too!" Mike pointed out.

"Who? El?"

"No, dumbass, your SoCal girlfriend!"

"Am not!"

"Are so!"

"Whatever! Why don't you just shut the fuck up and either go make up with your girlfriend or keep playing the game...You're killing my mojo!"

"Oh, I'm killing your 'mojo' now, am I?"

"You heard me!"

"Alright, that does it! But just remember, you asked for this..."

"Bring it on!"

Later that day, Lucas and Max went out on a date, when the topic of their friends' breakup came up into conversation...

"How is she?" asked Lucas.

"Not good...I don't think I've ever seen her this upset, and I'm her best friend," said Max.

"Aww, man, that bad, huh?"

"Yeah. *sighs* Have you seen Mike yet?"

"Yeah."

"And?"

"You don't want to know..."

"Well, El does. She wants to know how he was doing."

"I'll pass the message along. I told him he should tell her how he feels, so maybe he'll call her later...We'll see."

"Ugh, I just wish there was something we could do! I hate seeing them like this..."

"Yeah, me too."

taps fingers on table

"You know, I think if we really put our heads together, we could probably help them get back together."

"Maybe so, but how?"

"Well, I think we should just keep hanging out and see what information we can get out of them. Then, we can relay it back to each other and try to build up their confidence and get them to talk to each other."

"And we could put them in situations where they would have to be

alone together!"

"I like the way you think!" she said.

"Should we tell the guys?" he asked.

"Nah, it's better that we don't get them involved. Too many boys will botch my operation."

"Oh, so it's your operation, is it?"

"*sighs* Fine. *Our* operation."

"That's all I'm saying!"

"Mike's bound to tell Will at some point anyway, so it's only a matter of time until Dustin finds out."

"Yeah, you're probably right. I just feel bad that they're not apart of this."

"Just think of it as our *whispers in ear* dirty little secret..."

"Okay, I'm over it!"

"Yep, I've still got it..." she said to herself with satisfaction.

After a lot of long talks and reassuring, Lucas finally convinced Mike to call El. It terrified him not knowing where they stood, but he was ready to find out.

phone rings, picks up

"Hello?"

"It's so good to hear your voice again..."

"Mike!"

"What gave it away?" he said playfully.

"*giggles* Why are you calling me? I mean, I'm glad you did, but why did you?"

"I don't know, I just missed you! I wanted to see how you were doing."

"Well, you know, not great, but I'm getting there. How about you?"

"I'm getting there."

"I've missed you too, for the record."

"You have?"

"Yeah, I have."

"Well, do you think maybe we could, I mean, would you want to maybe..."

"Spit it out, Mike."

"*sighs* Do you wanna hang out sometime?"

"Yeah, I'd like that."

"Really? Great. Well, I'm free on Wednesday. Are you?"

"Did you even have to ask?"

"Well, I know you're free most of the time, but sometimes you and Max make plans during the week, so I wasn't sure if-

"Mike, relax, I was just teasing you."

"Oh. *chuckles*"

"Wednesday sounds great. Where are we going to meet?"

"Café sound good?"

"Yes!"

"Sweet! Well, I guess I'll see you then...Oh, or do you need me to pick you up?"

"If you don't mind, that would be great."

"Oh, I don't mind at all. I'll swing around your place at about 12:30."

"Okay. Well, I'll see you later I guess."

"See ya!"

hangs up

[Wednesday, Coffee Shop]

El laughed at Mike's joke, playfully hitting his arm, and then awkwardly rubbing it.

"Have you been working out?!" she asked.

"I have actually. Did you get a haircut?" he responded.

"I did! *plays with hair* Thanks for noticing."

smiles

"So, why did you only invite me out tonight?" asked El.

"What are you asking me?"

"I'm asking you if this is a date because it feels like a date."

"No, it's not a date. We'd have to be alone for it to be a date."

"But we're alone right now, aren't we?"

"Fair point!"

"*giggles* So, what do we talk about on this 'non-date'?"

"Anything you want!"

"Anything in mind?"

"Well, I was thinking we could talk about our friendship, and what that looks like moving forward."

"Mike, I know a friend is someone who you lend your comic books to

and they never break a promise, especially when it's spit, but I have no idea how to be your friend. Not after everything we've been through..."

"El-

"You didn't let me finish! But I want to be..."

"You do?"

"Yes."

"Well, I guess we should set some ground rules then if we really are going to be serious about this."

"Alright, although, you should know, I don't do too well with rules..." she said.

"Is that so?"

"Why don't you just shut up and tell me the rules, Wheeler."

"Well, we can't kiss anymore obviously."

"That's a shame..."

"And we can hug, but only for the normal amount of time that friends would."

"What about holding hands?"

"Only if we're helping each other get back up or something, but we can't lock fingers."

"Then what *can* we do? Because it sure seems like we're losing everything and gaining nothing from it."

"I don't know...This sucks..."

"We can still talk and hang out like we used to, just not as a couple and probably not alone anymore. But we can still be there for each other," he continued.

"Can we still love each other?"

"Yeah, I mean, we can't really control that. Well, at least I can't."

"I can't either."

"*smiles* It's nice to know I'm not the only one."

"We'll always be in this together, even when we're not actually together."

"Absolutely, but...*sighs* as much as that hurts me to say this, we probably shouldn't say it anymore, that we love each other I mean."

"Yeah...I guess that's for the best."

"So, friends?"

"Friends!"

"Shall we shake on it?"

"*spits, extends hand* We shall!"

spits, extends hand

both shake hands

"You know, we're practically frenching in friend language..." said Mike.

"You wish!"

"Yeah, I do wish!"

"Oh, cut it out, will you? *pauses to think, cracks smiles* It was good, wasn't it?"

"The best..."

"And you can't look at me like that anymore! That's definitely going on the list," said El.

"Look at you like what?"

"Like you want to french me."

"So what if I do?" he said with a charming grin.

"I have no response to that..."

Before leaving, El said:

"Hey, um, I feel kind of weird bringing this up, but I still have some of your stuff if you want it."

"Oh, I didn't even think about it. *pauses* Eh, it's fine. Don't worry about it, I'll just get it next time I come over to your house," said Mike.

"There's going to be a next time?" she repeated excitedly.

"*giggles* Yeah, next time."

"*smiles* Good."

"Do you need me to give you back your stuff too?"

"There's no rush. I'll get it from you some time or another."

"Alright, sounds good."

"So..." she said.

"So!" he said.

"Guess this is it..."

"Guess so. *sighs* Well, take care of yourself for me, alright?"

"*smiles* Will do, but only if you do the same!"

"I will, I promise," he said with a smile.

"Bye, Mike..." she said flirtatiously.

"Bye, El," he said as if he already knew that he would see her again soon.

As El most astutely pointed out, they were always together, even when they weren't. And it was for that very reason that they decided to start off with a clean slate. They were finally at the point where they were at peace with their breakup and could have healthy conversations about it without worrying about making things worse. Their fate had changed. They were friends. It was nice to talk to each other and joke around, but it was still nothing compared to the way that things used to be and they missed each other terribly in that regard. Every relationship wasn't without its ups and downs, so maybe being together forever was a little overrated. However, this friendship was a "halfway happy" attempt to a potentially stronger relationship and they both found comfort in knowing that. At the end of the day, they were still Mike and El.

34. Absence Makes The Heart Grow Fonder

Guys, it's been real! I have so enjoyed working on this story for the past two years. This is my last chapter, but if all goes according to plan, I will most likely do another Mileven story after season 3 comes out. It's so close, guys! Also, I might do other ships and stories about other shows, so stay tuned.

This chapter goes out to all my fellow Whovians! I discovered Doctor Who when I was in 6th grade and it totally changed my life. It was the first show I ever really loved besides ones I had seen during my Disney and Nickelodeon days and now, at this point in my life, Stranger Things is for me now what Doctor Who was for me in 6th grade. My best friend and I got even closer because of it and I wouldn't be the fangirl I am today without it. I had anticipated making a whole 'nother story that was a Stranger Things/Doctor Who crossover, but I decided to just use that for one chapter in which The Doctor makes a cameo, since it's already related to time travel. My hope is that even if you've never seen Doctor Who, that you will enjoy the concept of The Doctor's character in relation to the Stranger Things bunch. Also, even if you hate Doctor Who, you won't want to miss this chapter, trust me! Well, without further ado, I present you Stranger Who!

(P.S. As always, feel free to leave a comment. Also, I agree with the fact that lately, my extension of Mike as a character has made him look like the bad guy. This was not my original intention, but I figured that his parents' separation and growing pains might explain some of this. I feel like this chapter shows his more redeeming qualities. Mike is actually my favorite character, I see him as anything but the bad guy. If anything, he's one of the sweetest characters there is, but every character has flaws. I am merely just trying to show that he's going through a rough patch. This chapter in particular shows his reliability and loving nature that we all adore. This may come across like this chapter's more about Doctor Who than Stranger Things based on how much I wrote about it above, but honestly, it's still mainly about post-breakup Mileven, so even if you hate

Doctor Who, I think you'll still like this chapter. That being said, here's some brief context for those of you who are unfamiliar with what Doctor Who is about, however, it will be explained more throughout the story: The Doctor is an alien from a planet known as Gallifrey. His species is known as the time lords and he has two hearts, which allows him to regenerate. He is a time traveler, hence the name of his species, who travels in a time machine which is known as the tardis. He often doesn't travel alone, as he prefers to explore time and space with a companion or two. He has been through many hardships, many wars, etc. He is very quirky and witty, but also incredibly intelligent. There are many references laced in here, but everything else is pretty much self-explanatory or directly explained.)

"Mike, this, you & me, I need this to work."

"El, we broke up for a reason..."

"You and I both know that, but I'm not ready to let go yet. I'm not someone who gives up. You know that better than anyone."

"That's true, you're not."

"So, that's why I'm asking you to give this another chance."

"Do you think I like seeing you like this? Don't you think it hurts me to see you here all because of something I did? Believe me, I hate this just as much as you do, but it's for the best."

"Please, Mike! Let's just get back togeth-"

door opens

Doctor comes in

El's eyelids opened instantly. She found that she was still in a bed, but it was her own rather than a hospital bed. Still a little groggy, she suddenly realized that it was all a dream. *But how could that be?* she asked herself. It felt so real, but she knew it was just her mind's way of telling her that she missed Mike, though not for much longer, as it was finally here! The day Mike and the boys had been waiting to come for weeks...July 3! Not only was this the week that the new and

improved Starcourt Mall was opened to the public, but this day in particular was the day that the new movie Back to the Future would come out. Even before their break-up, Mike had already made sure that El reserve this day to hang out with him, Max, and the boys. He called her at noon to make sure she was still on.

rings

picks up

"Hey, El, it's Mike."

"Hi."

"How've you been?"

"Oh, you know..."

"Yeah, *sighs* well, I was calling because I wanted to see if you were still on to see Back to the Future with us today."

"Oh, I had totally forgotten about that...Um, I mean, yeah, I want to see it, it's just...Won't that be kind of weird, you know, with us hanging out around the others after we just broke up? I mean, some of them don't even know about it yet."

"I mean, yeah, it'll be a little weird, but it's better that we get used to it sooner than later. Besides, it'll give us an opportunity to tell the rest of them if we wanted to."

"That's a good point...Okay, I'm in!"

"Great! Well, I'll see you then, I guess...unless you need a ride."

Though tempted by his offer, she politely declined, knowing that it's what was best for the both of them.

"Oh no, I got a bike, but thanks anyway."

"Oh...Cool. Well, see you in a bit. Bye, El."

"Bye, Mike."

hangs up

Later that day, before seeing the movie, Max called El to check in on her and also see if she was going. Once she found out that she was, she advised her to dress her best.

"El listen to me very carefully! This moment is crucial. You already met once alone to establish a friendship, but this is his first time seeing you after making that agreement. This is our first time all meeting together as a party again. You have to knock his socks off! You have to dazzle him. You have to act like nothing's happened, like you're over it. You have to show him that you're better than ever. You have to make him see that he's better when he's with you."

"There's no use...He was very clear about the rules of friendship."

"El, don't give up just yet. There's still a chance, just trust me."

"*sighs* Fine..." she groaned.

"That's my girl! See you in a few."

"Kay, bye."

hangs up

Just as each of them paid for their tickets, El showed up in a cute, sweetheart, spaghetti strap dress with a white fabric that looked like it had been painted with actual water colors. Mike wasn't the only boy who took notice. Dustin and Will did too.

"Wow...You look...great," said Mike, shyly.

"Thanks, I feel great," she said as Max winked in her direction.

"Glad to hear it."

After paying for her own ticket, Lucas said:

"Well, shall we?"

"We shall," said Max.

Lucas, Dustin, and Will decided to go get snacks, while everyone else headed towards the theater. Lucas, however, was faster than the others. First, he sat down, then Mike, then Max, then El. Nearly two minutes after they did, Lucas whispered to Mike that he forgot the napkins and asked him if he would go back and get them for him.

"Are you serious right now?"

"Yeah!"

"*sighs* Fine, but next time I'm not saving you a seat."

"Fine by me."

leaves

Suddenly, a light bulb went off in Max's head and she leaned over to El and whispered:

"Hey, now that I think about it, I'm craving some Hot Tamales. Would you mind going back and getting me some?"

"I thought tamales were a Mexican dish..." said El.

"*chuckles* No, you're right, they are, but there's also a spicy candy brand with the same name that comes in a red box."

"Oh, I think I have seen those before, I just didn't know the name. Sure, I'll get you some."

"You're the best! Here, *hands cash* this oughta cover it."

"Be right back!" she said.

As Mike and El left the theater, Dustin and Will entered and Max and Lucas scooted next to each other, leaving Mike and El with no other choice but to sit next to each other during the movie when they came back. Sure, they were civil, they were friends, but things were still awkward as hell.

Mike had already gotten the napkins but noticed El was still standing in line, waiting to pay for Max's Hot Tamales.

"Long line?" he asked.

"Yep."

"That's too bad. Well, I have no desire to see the previews, so I'll just hang out here with you until then, if you don't mind."

"Oh, o-okay. *clears throat* I mean, yeah, sure! I don't mind."

"Sweet."

As they waited, they chatted amongst themselves like two high school sweethearts seeing each other for the first time in years at their class' reunion, or in their case, middle school sweethearts. That was until it came El's turn in line.

"Oh, hi. Um, I'll have one box of Hot Tamales please," she said shyly.

"Alright, *clicks cash register keys* that'll be \$4.36," said the cashier.

El looked down at her hands and suddenly realized that she had lost the cash that Max had given her.

"Just a moment, please," she said politely.

"Make it quick," the lady said rudely.

"Shit!" El said under her breath.

"What? What is it?" asked Mike.

"I must've dropped the \$5 bill that Max gave me...I don't see it anywhere and I don't have enough money left to pay for it myself."

"Honey, I'm going to need you to pay for this, you're holding up the line," said the cashier.

"I'm sorry...You can just put it back, I guess."

"Nonsense! It's all on me. My treat," said Mike, pulling out his wallet.

"Mike, that's awfully sweet of you, but you don't have to do this, really!"

"It's nothing."

Shortly after, they returned to the theater only to find that their original seats had been taken and now there were only two left beside each other.

"What the hell is this?" asked Mike.

"Sorry, Mike. We wanted to sit together. You know how it is, with couples and all..." said Lucas.

Mike grumbles

El passes Hot Tamales to Max

"Thanks, El!" said Max.

El smiled at Max. Then, she slowly started to sit down at the same time as Mike, as they exchanged weird and awkward glances. It was almost like if two exes got paired together as lab partners for a chemistry experiment, and sitting together in dim lighting, watching a movie in the theater, a place notorious for being the home to handholding, kissing teens, well, let's just say this gave "chemistry experiment" a whole 'nother meaning.

As the movie opened, the kids sat with utter excitement in their eyes. In the scene where Marty McFly was late to school, Mike turned to El and moved a piece of hair behind her ear before whispering in it. This startled her and she gasped, turning in his direction. He then said:

"*whispers* Sorry, I was just gonna say that this is like Dustin being late to school on a daily basis."

"*giggles* Oh," she replied, then repeating his comment to Max until it finally reached the end of the row where Dustin was sitting.

Dustin then leaned forward in his seat and said:

"Psst, Mike!"

"Yeah?" he whispered.

shoots the bird

Max, however, was far more amused by how Marty held onto the edge of cars while skateboarding, thinking that it would get him to school faster.

Throughout the movie, Mike would say things to El. When Marty and Jennifer made plans to meet at the lake, he said:

"God, I miss going to Lovers' Lake with you."

He could tell by the way she looked at him that she did too. When the audience first saw the Dolorian, he said "That car is totally bitchin', amirite?" And in that moment he began to look at her longingly, slowly realizing that he had just used one of her catchphrases.

"November 5th. That's only two days before we met," he said as Marty and Doc set the time to that day.

"Yeah, I guess you're right and what a long time ago that was."

At first, their hands were in their laps and they fidgeted a lot, like they didn't know what to do with them. It was weird not having their hands all over each other all the time. It felt unnatural, like they only knew what it was like to be a couple and nothing but that. It was almost like they couldn't get used to the feeling of being alone together, and not in the sense of having alone time in a relationship, but the feeling of being alone itself because they were no longer in a relationship but were still around one another. They had never felt so alone while being together.

Both of them scrunched up their faces as if they were in physical discomfort. It was almost like they couldn't get used to the feeling of keeping their hands to themselves, though it wasn't for long, as Mike "accidentally" threw his arm around El.

"*peels arm off shoulder* Sorry! Old habits die hard, ya know?" said Mike.

"Yeah, I think I do...It's okay though," she said.

Both of their minds wandered to another place and their fingers slowly crawled towards one another with an undeniable urge to connect. It was like their bodies had suddenly taken over their actions and all of their judgment. They were no longer in control, but rather their feelings were guiding their every move for them. This dreadful tease was almost too much to bare. They could feel the tension rising and building with every inch they neared and when one of them stopped, the other stared.

During the radiation scene, El suddenly moved her hand to the arm of her chair, hoping that Mike would now know how she felt. Without one more agonizing thought, he flipped her hand over and slid his fingers between hers as their palms clasped together, holding her hand at the sight of hazmat suits on the screen. And in that moment, they locked gazes and Mike whispered: "Everything's going to be okay." El replied, saying, "I know because you're here with me." He smiled. Then, they both paused to take it in and thought about it constantly after it happened. It was quick, like ripping off a bandaid, but in some ways, it felt like it relieved the pain they both felt more so than it did cause it. It was intimate in its own way. Sometimes, she could feel his fingers twitching against her skin nervously, but she put him at ease, rubbing her thumb against his index finger with such endearment and familiarity. Other times, he would squeeze her hand tighter like he was afraid he would lose it and she did the same in response. They would readjust their hands together when they got tired and in doing that, their wrists rested against each other and their faces slowly drew nearer, leaning closer and closer without realizing.

Before Mike even had the chance to say it, El turned to him during the dance scene and said:

"Kinda like the Snow Ball, huh?"

"Uh huh," he said, as he grew sadder, his eyes tearing up.

During that same moment he said:

"Blues, your favorite."

"Can't believe you remembered!" she said.

"Of course I did! It hasn't been that long and besides, I could never forget something as important as that."

El smiles

After the movie, the gang headed to the one and only Starcourt Mall for some group fun. The others discussed the movie, while Lucas had something else in mind.

"*pulls Mike aside* So, you guys are looking especially friendly today..." Lucas said.

"Shut up..."

"Well?" he asked.

"Well, what?"

"Did you seal the deal?"

"Not exactly..." said Mike.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well, it's complicated..."

"Oh, don't give me that bullshit again! Mike, what'd you do?"

"I may have friend zoned her."

"You dumbass! What happened to still being in love with her?"

"Nothing. Nothing's changed, I just figured this would be a good foundation to build up from and if not, then at least we're still in each other's lives."

"Alright, I guess that's fair, just don't screw this up!"

"Don't worry, I'm not going to. Just chill!"

While Lucas saw this as progress for the two, Dustin saw it differently. He was so used to seeing them all coupley that seeing them like this made him sense that something weird was going on.

"*pulls Lucas aside* Something doesn't smell right..." Dustin said to Lucas.

"What do you mean? I don't smell anything."

"I *mean*, something smells fishy...What's up with Mike and El? They're so different today."

"Really? I hadn't noticed."

"That's 'cause you're you! But no, I can tell, something's different..."

"You're probably just imagining things again," Lucas said, denying what he already knew was true.

"Fine, don't believe me then! See if I care," Dustin said angrily.

On the other hand, Max was busy checking in with El, which turned into them having a chat of their own.

"So, I couldn't help but notice who was holding your hand during the movie..." said Max.

"I was afraid you were gonna bring this up..." El admitted.

"You bet your ass I was! So..."

"So what?"

"What's going on with you two? What do you think it means?"

"I don't know, I think...I think he wants me back."

"And what about you?"

"I think...I think I might want him back too."

"I was hoping you'd say that! C'mon, let's do a check."

"A check?"

"Yeah, to see if you have any kernels in your teeth or if your hair's sticking up or something like that. We have to make sure you look

really good. Open wide!"

flashes teeth

"*pats hair down* You're all good to go! Now go get him!"

"Thanks, Max!"

"Anytime, El."

Then, she ran up to him and said:

"Hey, Mike! Wait up..."

"What's up?" he asked.

"Nothing much, I was just...*stops to think* thinking of getting some ice cream. You in?"

"With you? I mean, yeah, totally!"

"Great! Follow me..."

As the two of them each got a delicious frozen treat, Max caught up with Lucas, reminiscing over their two best friends getting back together and how they might go about making that happen.

"Hey, you! *kisses* Did you talk to Mike?" asked Max.

"Yeah. It sounds like he and El are just friends right now, but he's hoping it'll turn into something."

"Well, according to El, it sounds like it already is...He held hands with her during the movie."

"Shit, you serious? Wow...Well, he managed to leave out that major detail!"

"Yeah, well, that's Mike for you!"

"True. *shakes head* I just can't believe that they actually broke up though...I mean they're Mike and El!"

"What? Mike and El broke up?!" asked Dustin, eavesdropping from the distance.

"Uh oh..." said Max.

"Busted!" said Lucas.

"Will one of you pinheads answer my question?"

"Alright, fine. You caught us! They broke up. You happy now?" said Lucas.

"No, no, quite the opposite actually...What-what happened?"

explains

"Shit...I knew that all of this ditching us was gonna come back to bite them in the ass...*sniffles* I just never thought it would end like this," said Dustin.

"Dustin, are you crying?"

"No, what the hell are you talking about? It's just bead of sweat, it's summer for god's sakes."

"Uh huh, sure!"

"Well, what the hell are we all standing around for? Let's get crackin'!" said Dustin.

"Crackin' on what exactly?" asked Max.

"Operation Mileven of course!"

"Oh no, no, no! This is not happening..." said Lucas.

"Why not?"

"No offense, Dustin, but I think Max and I know a little bit more about this than you do...I mean, you haven't even gone on a date with a girl."

"Narrow, man...Little harsh, don't ya think?" asked Dustin.

"Sorry, man, it's just...I don't think there's much more you could do."

"Ye of little faith! Well, we'll just see about that...Let's make this into a little competition shall we? You and Max vs. me and Will."

"Bring it on, shitbird!" said Max.

"You're going to have to tell Will first though," said Lucas.

"Easy peasy!" said Dustin.

Once Dustin found a moment alone with Will, he told him everything about Mike and Eleven.

"Hey, Will, I gotta tell you something, man."

"Okay, what is it?"

"Mike and El broke up," he said. "Crazy, huh?"

"Yeah, it is, but *sighs* how do I say this...? Um...I already knew about it," said Will.

"What? Who told you?"

"Mike."

"I should've known...Wait, so you're telling me I was the last to find out?"

"Sounds like it...I'm sorry, I would've told you, but I thought you already knew."

"Eh, it's whatever. Well, anyway, I figured that we could team up and try to get them back together. I kind of made a bet with Max and Lucas out of it."

"That's sick!" said Will.

"What? No it's not. It's all to help them!"

"Still seems a little selfish to me..."

"Oh c'mon, please, Will...? You and Mike are so close, hell, you're ever closer with him than the three of us combined! That gives us an advantage! Besides, I think you could really get through to him. And El, well, she's practically already your sister."

"Yeah, but-"

"But nothing!*sighs* Tell you what, I'll let you have any one of my comic books if you win."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously."

"You have yourself a deal," he said, shaking his hand like a spit swear.

"Yes! Operation Mileven is a go!" said Dustin.

Meanwhile, back at Scoops Ahoy, after catching up with Steve, the two sat down at a table.

"Mike, can I ask you something?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Are you sure you still want to be friends?"

"Absolutely! Not being friends isn't an option, it just can't be."

"But why? Why would you want to spend time with me? We're only tempting ourselves! No good could come from that..."

"Oh, but you're so wrong, El. It's the closest I can get to still being with you, and I'll take whatever I can get."

"*smiles* You're still my Mike."

"You're still my El."

El smiles

"This is the part where I would kiss you now if we weren't broken

up," he said.

El blushes, bites lip

Funnily enough, the four friends were so busy planning out how to get them back together, that they didn't even realize that they were already alone together in the first place!

"*chuckles* I've missed this," said El.

"What?" asked Mike.

"This...us *nudges shoulder*," said El.

"Me too."

"How did things get so screwed up?" she asked.

"I don't know...I ask myself that same question every day since we ya know...broke up."

smiles

furrows brows in confusion

"Hey, Mike, what's that? *points*" El asked curiously.

"What's what?"

"I don't know...There's this blue box over there, it kind of looks like a photo booth."

"Let's go check it out."

"Okay."

"OH. MY. GOD..." he said.

"Hmm...I've never heard of a Police Public Call Box before, have you?" she asked, the chief's daughter in her wanting to know more.

"It can't be! This can't be real..." he said, walking around it and rubbing the sides of the familiar blue box.

"So you have heard of it! What does it mean?"

"El, th-th-that's the tardis!"

"What's a tardis?"

"It stands for Time And Relative Dimension In Space."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"It's a... *whispers* time machine."

"Mike, don't be stupid. Time machines don't exist! This isn't Back to the Future!"

"They do in television..."

"Yeah, but what does that have to do with anything?"

He turned to her and grabbed her by the shoulders, looking her straight in the eyes and saying:

"El, listen, everything I'm about to tell you, it stays a secret, got it?"

"Mike, you're scaring me! Will you please just tell me what's going on?"

"You know that show that the guys and I like, Doctor Who?"

"Yeah, I've heard you mention it a couple of times."

"Well, in the show, there's this alien from the species of time lords and he calls himself the Doctor. This is his time machine. It can go back and forward in time and take you anywhere in the universe. You could travel somewhere for a lifetime and it would only last five minutes here!"

"Why is it here? I thought it was a British show...Shouldn't it be in some British tv studio somewhere?"

"I don't know, but we're gonna find out!"

"What? Are you crazy?"

"C'mon, El...Don't you wanna have a little fun? It could be a prank or it could be real! We'll never know until we find out."

"What about the others?"

"Oh, I'm one step ahead of you!" he said, pulling out his supercomm.

"*presses button* Listen, guys, this is not a joke, I repeat, this is not a joke. Code blue! Code blue! Over."

[Several seconds later]

"Code Blue? What the hell is code blue? Over." asked Dustin.

"The tardis. It's here! Over."

"You've gotta be shitting me...Mike, snap out of it! Back to the Future's not real and neither is Doctor Who, no matter how much we want them to be. Over." said Lucas.

"You don't believe me? Fine! Come see it for yourselves. Meet us by the water fountain. Over."

"Copy that. Over and out," said Will.

Within moments, they were all gathered around the tardis, their mouths ajar in awe of how lifelike it was.

"Nah, I don't buy it," said Max.

"Aww, c'mon, you seriously can't tell me this doesn't look real," said Mike.

"It's probably just a practical joke or something. Besides, why would the tardis land here?" asked Lucas.

"Guys, this is Hawkins we're talking about! Stranger things have happened..."

"He's not wrong..." said Will.

"If anything, this town is practically crying for the Doctor!" said Dustin.

"Exactly!"

"Oh my god, none of this is real...It's a tv show for christ's sake!" Max groaned.

"With everything that's happened to us in these past two years, our whole life's practically a tv show waiting to be written! We can either walk away and pretend like we never saw it or-"

"We can step inside and see what happens," El finished.

"Now, who's with me?" asked Mike.

El put her hand in, then Dustin, then Will. Lucas and Max stood there like two stubborn mules, with arms crossed and furrowed brows.

"Your loss..." said Mike, stepping in after El.

They walked in and looked around, astonished and a little bewildered. It was extravagant, but something was off.

"It's bigger on the inside!" Dustin teased with his now not toothless smile.

"Why doesn't it look like the one in the show?" asked Will.

"I don't know, but I think we have bigger problems..." said Mike, locking eyes with the Doctor.

"Ain't she a beaut? Is that how they say it?" asked the Doctor.

"Maybe in the South, not in Indiana."

"Oh, is that where we are? This damn monitor's always screwing things up. Anyway, if you don't mind my asking, how did you kids get in here? The doors were locked," said the Doctor.

"Her. She let us in," said Mike, pointing to El.

"*Mike!*" she said, worried about revealing her powers to a stranger.

"Yeah, she's kind of like our very own sonic screwdriver!" Dustin joked.

"She's not an object!" Mike snapped.

El smiles

"He's a keeper, this one!" said the Doctor. "How long have you two been together?"

"Uh...Well, we're not, I mean we were, but we're not anymore," said El.

"Ah, I see...Never mind that then! How can I help you kids?"

"We were just looking for *clears throat* the Doctor. Have you seen him?" asked Mike.

"That depends...Doctor who?" he questioned playfully.

laughs Well, that's kind of the point actually! We don't know either. He's just called the Doctor. You wouldn't happen to know him, would you?"

"Sure would. You're looking at him!"

"No, I think you're mixed up, we're not looking for just any doctor."

"I am the Doctor."

"The Doctor has blond hair...yours is brown."

"Friends don't lie! Tell us the truth!" said El.

"Guys, let's give him the benefit of the doubt...There's still the possibility of regeneration," said Will.

"If you're really the Doctor, then prove it," said Mike.

The Doctor then walked over to El and put his hands on her cheeks and temples, reading her mind.

"Oh dear...You've been through quite a lot now, haven't you?"

"You have no idea..." she said.

"Oh, but I think I do...Eleven."

"H-H-How do you know my name?" she asked nervously, amazed, with slight fear in her eyes.

"You're not the only one who's named after a number, El."

"In our time, you're in your *counts on fingers* 6th regeneration stage, so which one are you in now?" asked Mike.

"Eleventh."

"Oh my god, there's two of them!" Dustin said, putting his hands on the side of his multicolored trucker cap.

"I can't believe this is happening...What are the chances!" said Mike.

Once the Doctor offered to take them somewhere, anywhere they wanted, they decided that the future was where their hearts most desired to go.

Meanwhile, Lucas and Max were struggling to find something in the mall that was better than the tardis they had come upon.

"*bounces leg anxiously* What's taking them so long?" asked Max.

"I don't know, but this is a bunch of bullshit. *sighs* That's it, I'm calling them."

Lucas tried to listen in on their conversation from outside the door and asked what's going on over the supercomm. Dustin and Will replied, saying that they were about to take the tardis for a spin. Once they heard the shrill, rusty sound of the beloved blue box taking off coming through their supercomms, they knew it wasn't just too good to be true, and with that, they bolted towards the doors, as their friends pulled them inside the disappearing time machine. Once inside, Mike asked:

"Okay, who told?"

"Who told what?" asked Dustin.

"Well, by the looks of you and Will, I'm getting the impression that that wasn't the first time you heard about me and El."

"Well, Lucas already knew, and then El told Max, and Dustin overheard Lucas and Max and told me, though you know I already knew," said Will.

"Really, Max?" asked Mike.

"Well, what did you think was going to happen, Mike? You're the reason we're all friends in the first place, we were gonna find out about it eventually," said Lucas.

"*puts hand on shoulder* Mike, it's okay. Really!" said El.

Mike nods

This started a side conversation between Mike and Lucas.

"What? It's nothing but a little innocent flirting..." said Mike.

"You and I both know that flirting is never innocent," said Lucas.

"So, where to?" asked the Doctor.

"What do you mean 'Where to'? I thought we were already headed somewhere," said Lucas.

"No, I stopped when you all started bickering, in case it changed your decision somehow, you just didn't notice."

"Oh. Well, what do you guys think? The past or the future? America or another country? Or planet even!" asked Mike.

Max looked at the other boys, as they had just talked about the possibility of traveling to Hawkins in the future and seeing what Mike and Eleven's future looked like with the way things were going now. They all nodded and said:

"Take us to 1999 in Hawkins. *runs over to the Doctor, whispers in ear* High School Reunion specifically."

"You got it," he said.

"What'd you say to him?" asked El.

"That's for me to know and you to find out..." said Max.

El rolls eyes and smiles

"Well, here we are! Now, if anyone asks, say you are your own children. For example, Will, if anyone asks who you are, say that you are Will Byers' son and either give yourself the same name or a different one. That being said, try to avoid running into yourselves at all costs because if you get too close, you could undo your own existence. Do we understand each other?" said the Doctor.

"Yes," said Will.

"Splendid! Well, I better get my special bowtie."

"*laughs* How can a bowtie be special?" Max critically asked.

"Oh, Max! All bowties are special. You see, bowties are cool."

"More like stupid."

"Suit yourself...Ah, you see what I did there?" he said, earning many laughs.

Once they got there, they looked around in awe at all of the people that they would one day go to high school with, many of whom they already knew and recognized from Hawkins Middle. They got some snacks and traveled around to different people, marveling at the phones in people's purses and pockets, the music playing in the background, and the clothes and hairstyles among the people there.

"So, tell me, Stacey, who sings this?" asked Dustin.

"Are you serious?" she asked, without even realizing that he already knew her name.

"Yeah, seriously!"

"It's Baby One More Time by Britney Spears."

"Britney who?"

"Man, your parents sure have sheltered you from the world, huh?"

"You have no idea..." he said.

"Well, your dad was a sweet guy. You look just like him, my gosh! Anyway, but I've always felt bad, I used to be a real bitch to him, ya know. Oh, sorry, 'scuse my language!"

"Eh, don't worry about it. I don't just get my looks from him, but my potty mouth too!"

"*laughs* And humor apparently! Well, anyway, you tell him I said hi and that I'm awfully sorry about what happened at the Snow Ball all those years ago."

"Roger that," he said with a smile.

"You're a good kid, Dustin Jr."

"Thanks, Stace. It was nice talking to you."

"You too. Maybe I'll see you again someday."

"I'm sure you will," he said.

Then, after hearing about Dustin's encounter with Stacey, the others began asking about what their "parents" were like in high school, though really they meant their older selves.

"Well, hello there! You must be Mike's kid," said a classmate.

"Yep, and El- I mean, Jane's son."

"Jane, as in Jane Hopper?"

"Yep."

"Wow! That's so strange because you sure do look like your father, but they haven't been together in ages, or at least that's what I heard."

Did she have you in high school?"

"Nope, just afterward. Years later."

"Huh, well, I must be mistaken then."

"When did they break up?" he asked.

"I don't think they were ever together really, but everyone always thought they should've been."

"Oh. Well, tell me, what were they like?"

"Well, Mike was one of the smartest guys I knew. He was always a great leader and a good friend. We had some good times together. Oh and I just adored El! She was so sweet and shy, and one of my dearest friends," said a classmate.

"Yeah, she's beautiful-I mean, a great mom."

laughs

Mike walked away, saddened by the fact that this person couldn't even remember when he and El were last together. It was in that moment that Dustin approached him and asked:

"Mike, can I have a word with you, in private?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Now that it's all on the table, what is this thing with you and El? What are you guys?"

"What *are* we?"

"Yeah, you heard me."

"We're just friends, that's all."

"Oh, like Nancy and Jonathan were 'friends'?"

"*sighs* I don't know. There, I said it. I don't know..."

"Well, you better figure it out soon because the clock is ticking...quite

literally."

"Gee, thanks for the tough love, Lucas!"

"Hey, I am NOT Lucas!"

"No, you're right, you're not...You're just twice the pest he is."

"Am not!"

raises eyebrows

"So that's what you think of me, huh?" asked Dustin.

"I'm just messing with you. I love you, man. *nudges shoulder*" said Mike.

Dustin smiles

Meanwhile, El herself sat in a chair by the wall and watched as her future self and Mike saw each other for the first time in 10 years. At first, Future Mike was circling around the room, clearly scanning for her among the crowd in the gym. Then, he turned his shoulder and there she was. She came through the door, looking better than he had ever seen her. She was wearing a brown, bodycon, spaghetti strap dress that ended just a few inches above her knees. The dress was plaid and nostalgic, as it reminded Mike of her dad's plaid shirts that she used to wear when they first dated, that was before Starcourt Mall opened, of course. Her hair was twisted up into a clip, much like Rachel Green. Walking through the gym, she stopped suddenly and looked him in the eye, mouth ajar but slowly turning into a big smile. Approaching each other, they met in the middle of the gym floor.

"Jane Hopper? I'll be damned!" he said.

"*giggles* Well, if it isn't Mike Wheeler!" she said.

"I can't believe this! How long has it been? 10 years?"

"No, 11."

"*laughs* Good one!"

"Thanks."

"Well, you look pretty...good. I mean, amazing, really."

"*giggles* Thanks, that's sweet of you. You look good too, really good. *looks up & down* Handsome even!"

"Preciate it. *pauses* Well, can I get you anything? Punch maybe?"

"Sure, that would be great, thank you."

"My pleasure. Wait right here, I'll be back in just a sec."

"*smiles* Okay."

As this happened, Present Max and Lucas watched as their future married selves watched Mike and El talk again for the first time in 10 years. Nothing had changed. They were still the same loveable, meddling couple that they were currently.

Meanwhile, Future El stood there and caught herself smiling like she hadn't smiled in years. It was fated that they would meet again like this, but how would she tell him that she had moved on?

"Here you go," he said. "So, tell me El, what are you up to these days?"

"Well, I actually write. Books, that is. I guess you could say I'm an author. I just started though, so haven't published anything yet, but I'm working on my first novel. It's about my life."

"Get out! That's so exciting...Wow!"

"What about you? What do you do? *sips drink*"

"Well, I'm actually starting this organization that works closely with the scientific community to advocate for human rights and prevent abuse."

"Oh, Mike, that's incredible! I'm so proud of you! *lightly punches shoulder*"

"Well, I never would've been able to do it if it wasn't for you, so thank you, El."

"*blushes* You called me El."

"You'll always be El to me."

"Mommy!" said the little girl, running towards Future El with open arms.

"Hey, sweetheart!" she said, picking her up and kissing her cheek.

"Y-You have a kid?" he asked.

"I have a kid!" she said with a smile. "Mike, this is my daughter, Rory."

"*eyes light up* Rory! What a great name!" he said with a wink.

In that moment, Present Mike walked up behind a sitting Present El and said:

"*laughs* I can't believe you're actually going to name your daughter Rory!"

"Oh geez, you scared me! *chuckles* Yeah, I'm actually not surprised though. I mean, you were a big part of my life. You still are, and you always will be."

"Well, apparently not always," he said.

Present El looked down in her lap with guilt and then looked back with Present Mike at their future selves.

"What do you say?" Future El asked Rory.

"It's nice to meet you Mr. Mike," she said, shaking his hand.

"Likewise!" he said.

Mike was interacting with Rory, letting her climb on his back and telling her jokes, when all of a sudden a man walked up beside El and put his hand around her waist, kissing her head and saying:

"Hey, honey."

"Hey! Oh, Mike, this is my husband, Thomas."

There was a pause. Future Mike could feel those 6 words crawling down his throat and moving down his chest until they reached his heart and gripped it so tightly that it broke into pieces.

"I can't believe I moved on..." said Present El.

"I can't believe I waited...Well, actually I can. 353 days is nothing," said Present Mike.

"*giggles* You're so full of it!" she replied.

"I've heard so much about you. Don't worry, all good things!" Thomas said, shaking his hand.

"*fake laughs* I'm sure," said Future Mike.

It was quite awkward, the whole thing, but they continued to talk amongst themselves...that was until an oldie came on, a song that Mike and El each held close to their heart: Every Breath You Take. They both looked at each other almost immediately. El said:

"Ohhuhho! Mike, do you remember this?"

"How could I forget!"

smiles

"What? What's so special about this song?" asked Thomas.

"You mean he actually doesn't know?" asked Mike.

"This is the song that Mike and I had our first dance to at the middle school formal," said El.

"Aww, that's sweet..." said Thomas.

"Not only our first dance, but our second ki-"

"SHHH!" said El.

"Thomas, may I steal your wife for a minute?"

"By all means," he said.

"C'mon, El. Let's show 'em how it's done."

"Mike, I don't know if this is such a good ide-Whoa!" she said, as he practically pulled her onto the dance floor.

He put each of her individual hands on his shoulders, one after the other, just like the first time. She smiled and swayed along with him. She had never slow danced with anyone other than Thomas ever since she got married, but that all would change soon enough. When the lyrics reached the part where he stole a kiss from her all those years ago, they each looked at each other and almost started leaning in, but stopped themselves, knowing it was wrong despite how right it felt. Afterwards, they headed back to their table.

"Well, I hate to cut it short, but I better be heading out soon," said Mike.

"So soon?" Thomas asked.

"Yeah, well, Will and I were going to get dinner, but you three are welcome to join us later if you want!" said Mike.

"Eh, that's okay. I think we're planning on staying for the dinner here actually, right babe?" asked Thomas.

"Yeah, r-r-right," she said, feeling guilty.

"Oh okay then. Well, it was really nice to meet you Rory...and Thomas. El, it's always a pleasure," he said, walking away.

"Mike, wait!" she said.

He stopped and she ran towards him and gave him a big, long hug, saying:

"Take care of yourself! I lo-I'll miss you."

"Only if you do the same," he said.

"Promise?" she asked playfully.

"Promise," he answered with a smile.

Present El could feel what her future self was feeling, see what she was seeing. She found herself in tears at the end of it all and when she turned her shoulder, she found that Mike was the same way. So, she ran to the girl's bathroom to freshen up and he followed her, afraid of leaving her by herself like this.

"*knocks on stall* El?" asked Mike.

"Mike, this is the girl's room. What are you doing in here?"

"I came to check on you."

"Well, I'm fine. I don't need a babysitter."

"Well, you're clearly not fine and I wasn't saying that, I just *sighs* I wanted to make sure you were okay. A lot just happened and I'm still processing it myself."

unlatches door, walks out

She looked at him with sincerity and wiped the tears away from her eyes with both hands. Then, she threw her arms around him and hugged him tight and long, just like Future El had done to Future Mike.

"I can't live 10 years without you. Things might not be in the cards for us now, but they will be someday," said Mike.

"We've known what it's like to be apart when we should've been together and now we know what it's like to be apart after we've already been together. Neither way works. God, how I wish we could do it all over. I never would've gotten married or had a kid with someone if that someone wasn't you."

"El, you can't beat yourself up over something that hasn't happened yet! You're forgetting, there's still time now. We'll have all the time in the world when we get back. The world is our oyster!"

"Mike, can I ask you something?"

"Sure, shoot!"

"Have you noticed that we've started flirting more than we used to now that we're broken up?"

"Yeah, I mean that's certainly true."

"You seem to know why that is..."

"I mean, yeah, or at least I know why I am."

"Why are you?"

"It's simple. Because I don't know how to go back to the way things were before we kissed, and frankly I don't want to...because I still love you, El."

"Mike, I'm tired of pretending. I'm not over you, I never was. And that's why...that's why I still love you too."

"*smiles* Really? You-You mean that?"

"Yeah, I really do. And don't you ever, ever, leave me. You got that, Mike Wheeler?"

"I promise," said Mike.

"Good. Then, let's get out of here."

"I second that!" he said.

"Well, then. Shall we?" she asked, holding out her hand.

"We shall!" he said, taking it in his.

They ran out of the gym together and then Mike turned to El and said:

"Wait, wait, I never even asked, what did you learn about your future self today?"

"Nothing," she said.

"*Nothing?*"

"Yeah, nothing. I didn't want to spoil anything for myself because I'm still figuring out who I am and I don't want someone else to determine that for me. I want to make my own destiny."

"That's beautiful."

"Who knew I had such deep wisdom, right?"

"I always did," he said.

"*smiles* Thanks."

"Anytime."

Once they reached the tardis, much to their surprise, they were the last ones there.

"Well, it took ya long enough!" said Dustin.

"Oh, well, I'm glad to have such a warm welcome!" said Mike.

"Boys, boys..." said Max. "Let's get the fuck out of here so we can fix the future, eh?"

"I'm down," said Lucas.

"Yes, come along, Wheeler," said the Doctor.

"Are you kids sure you just wanna go back home? There's a whole world out there waiting for you to explore!" he continued.

"That's awfully kind of you, Doctor, but I think we have more important things to settle at home. Right, guys?" said Will.

"Right," said El.

"Whatever tickles your peach!" he said, pulling the lever on the tardis. "Hold on tight, kids. GERONIMO!"

Though their journey was over, their curiosity doors were still unlocked, especially Eleven's. So, she stayed back in the tardis with him while the others explored the mall, all except for Mike, who waited outside the beloved time machine for her.

"So, El, tell me, do you like yourself?"

"I guess...I don't know. Other people like me, but how can I like myself when I don't fully know myself."

"If you know that you're a good person deep down, which I think you do, then that's all it takes. If you like your personality, if you like the way you look, if you take pride in the things that you love, then that's all you need really. Don't be afraid to try new things, El. You might even surprise yourself! Who knows?"

"*nudges shoulder* Thanks, Doctor."

"*pats back* Anytime, my friend."

"Doctor?" she asked.

"Yes, El?"

"You're a hero right?"

"I suppose so...Why, dear?"

"How do you do it?"

"How do I do what?"

"How do you do it? All the time, you protect the human race and you stand up to others that threaten them. I've seen it with my own eyes when I read your mind, and a complex one at that. I just want to know how you do it."

"The same way you do. I do it out of love for the people I'm closest to and that love extends out to those that I don't know, even those that are a stranger to me."

"Who knew that the mad man with a box had a soft side after all!"

she joked.

"*chuckles* Now let me ask you a question."

"Ask away!" she said.

"Why are you sitting here with an old fart like me when you could be telling the boy who loves you that you still love him too?"

"You just know everything there is to know about everyone, don't you?"

"No, but I know love when I see it and you guys are most certainly in love."

"Well, I got nothing, but I already told him and nothing happened."

"So show him then!"

"I guess you're right...I can't argue with *that*."

"Of course I'm right! I'm the Doctor."

"And how do I know that this won't be the last time I see you."

"You don't, but trust me, I'm the Doctor."

"Whatever that's supposed to mean..."

"Well, how 'bout friends don't lie, huh? That means something to you."

"Yeah, it does. *chortles, smiles* Well, I'll see you later then, my friend."

"Goodbye, El, but not forever! Now, go! Go find your Wheeler boy before it's too late!"

"I will. Goodbye, Doctor."

"Oh, and El!"

"Yes, Doctor?"

"Keep an eye on the lights because in this town, in this life, there's evil at every turn and you never know what's going to wreak havoc or when really, but I know you can handle it."

"Thanks, Doctor."

straightens bowtie

El opens doors, closes them

"Hey, you," said Mike.

"Hey!" she said.

"Do I love you or is Kali just messing with me because I can't seem to get you out of my head!"

El smiles, blushes

"So, do you think he'll ever come back?" he asked.

"I have a pretty good feeling that he will."

"What makes you think that?"

"It's an Eleven thing, you wouldn't understand."

"Oh, well, I guess I'll just have to take your word for it. That's all I can do really!"

"*chortles* Guess so."

"*gasps* You know what I just realized?" she continued.

"What?" he asked.

"Well, I had this dream this morning that I was so stressed out about our break up that it gave me a stomach ulcer that put me in the hospital and I was begging for you to take me back, until we were interrupted by a doctor walking in. I think maybe my dream was foreshadowing all of this. How the Doctor took us on a journey to learn what life would look like if we weren't together and that that would prompt us to get back together."

"Well, slow down, we're not back together yet, but maybe you're onto something..."

He threw his arm around her and she leaned her head against his shoulder.

"How many of our rules do you think we've broken today?" she asked.

"*chuckles* I don't know, practically all of them. *pauses* Well, there's still one we haven't broken yet..."

"Which one?" she asked.

gives her look

"Oh, that one," she said.

"Yeah..."

"Are you saying you want to?"

"I mean, I don't not want to," he said.

"Me neither."

"So, what does this mean? Are we doing this, right now?" he asked.

"I don't know, what do you think?"

His eyes darted up and down until finally landing on her lips without question this time.

"Screw it!" he said.

He placed his hands on both of her cheeks and began to lean in, but El was impatient and pulled him towards her by the collar of his shirt. She could feel his breath against her cheek as his lips met hers. But for Mike, just the feeling of her hand sliding down his chest alone was enough for him to want more than a friendship from her. Though only momentarily, they each held the back of one another's neck in unison with the same desire. At first, it was just a kiss, a trial, a test

to see how much they missed each other and how compatible they were now, but then it became more. At first, it was like everything was happening in slow motion and then it suddenly sped up and they could feel their friendship starting to fade away and sprout into something new yet familiar. Yes, at some point they let go, and not of each other, but of all of the things that were holding them back and they let loose. And within seconds, his hands brushed past her neck and met the small of her back, just as the tardis was starting to disappear behind them. And with that, he grazed the sides of her thighs and pulled her into his lap, the wind of the tardis' departure blowing in their faces.

"Well, so much for friendship!" said El.

"You could say that again!" he said.

continues kissing

lights flicker

"Is that you?" asked Mike.

"What do you mean 'is that me'?"

"Well, sometimes when you use your powers, the lights flicker, so I didn't know if you were just so turned on right now that it triggered your powers or something."

"Wow, someone's cocky!" she said.

"Oh, shut up!" he said.

"Make me!" she said.

kisses

"Nothing's wrong, right? It's probably just a problem with the wiring, you know new buildings can do that sometimes," he said.

"Yeah, totally," she said.

kisses

lights continue

stops

"Can't we ever catch a break?"

"Guess not. The Doctor actually warned me about the lights...Maybe this is what he meant."

"Great! This is just great! *sighs* Guess we have to go save the town again for the millionth time! *stands up*"

"Yeah, but you know what?"

"What?" he asked, reaching his hands out for her to grab onto.

"*grabs hands, pulls self up* There's no one I'd rather save it with."

smiles, kisses

And so, the two met with the others in the middle of the mall, including Steve, Robin, Nancy, Jonathan, Erica, Joyce, Hopper, and Murray, all of whom were ready to take on the next challenge that was coming their way. Who knew that the place that prompted their breakup in some ways, would also be what brought them back together...